Buddha Dhamma for University Students

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu



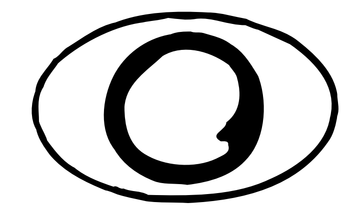
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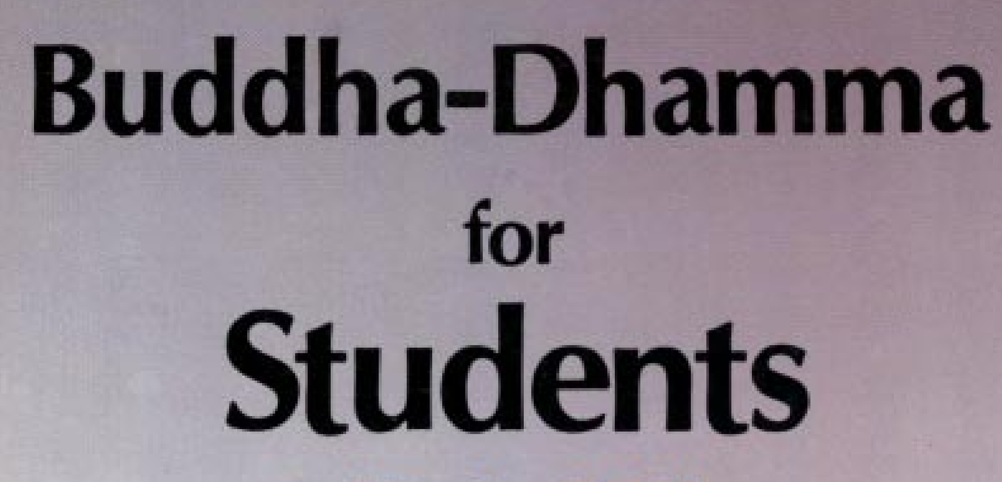
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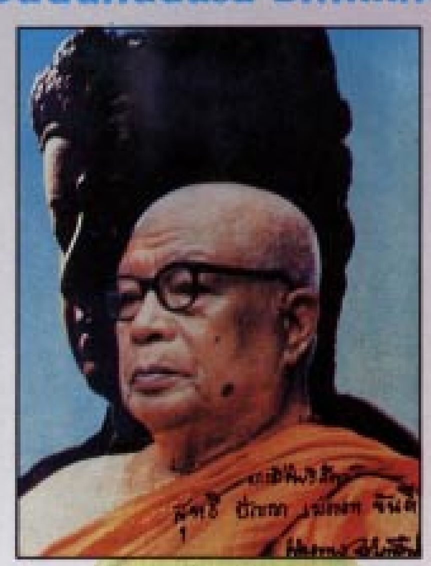




The Dhamma Study & Practice Group



Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu



Buddha-Dhamma For Students:
answers to questions a non-Buddhist is likely to ask about the fundamentals of Buddhism

BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU

translated from the Thai by
Ariyananda Bhikkhu (Roderick S. Bucknell)

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Anumondanā

(To all Dhamma Comrades, those helping to spread Dhamma:)

Break out the funds to spread Dhamma to let Faithful Trust flow,
   Broadcast majestic Dhamma to radiate long living joy.
Release unexcelled Dhamma to tap the spring of Virtue,
   Let safely peaceful delight flow like a cool mountain stream.
Dhamma leaves of many years sprouting anew, reaching out,
   To unfold and bloom in the Dhamma Centers of all towns.
To spread lustrous Dhamma and in hearts glorified plant it,
   Before long, weeds of sorrow, pain, and affliction will flee.
As Virtue revives and resounds throughout Thai society,
   All hearts feel certain love toward those born, ageing, and dying.
Congratulations and Blessings to all Dhamma Comrades,
   You who share Dhamma to widen the people's prosperous joy.
Heartiest appreciation from Buddhadāsa Indapañño,
   Buddhist Science ever shines beams of Bodhi longlasting.
In grateful service, fruits of merit and wholesome successes,
   Are all devoted in honor to Lord Father Buddha.
Thus may the Thai people be renowned for their Virtue,
   May perfect success through Buddhist Science awaken their hearts.
May the King and His Family live long in triumphant strength,
   May joy long endure throughout this our world upon earth.

from

Buddhadāsa

Mokkhabalārāma
Chaiya, 2 November 2530
(translated by Santikaro Bhikkhu, 3 February 2531 (1988))

Editor’s Foreword

Buddha-Dhamma for Students is the result of two talks given by Ajahn Buddhadāsa in January 1966 to students at Thammasat University, Bangkok. Then and in the years since, many young Thais have been returning to Buddhism in search of answers and possibilities not provided by their modern (Western-style) education. In the face of rapid social change, at times bordering on chaos, they seek a non-violent approach to the issues and injustices of the times. Their interest is praised and yet recognized as needing guidance. Applying a confused or incorrect version of Buddhism to social confusion and conflict will not do any good. Thus Ajahn Buddhadāsa always has tried to set both young and old straight as to what Buddhism really teaches. He does so by going back to the original principles pointed out by the Lord Buddha, explaining these simply and directly, and showing that their relevance is timeless. Truth is relevant and applicable in ancient India, contemporary Siam, and even the overly developed West.

These talks originally were titled *“Lak Dhamma Samrab Nak Seuksa* (Dhamma Principles For Students.)” A look at the words in this title will clarify the purpose of this book. First, we must understand what is meant by *“seuksa”* (borrowed from Sanskrit) and *“sikkhā”* (its Pali counterpart). Thais have used *seuksa* to translate the English terms “study” and “education,” but modern usage is impoverished in comparison to the original meaning. *Seuksa* goes further than merely accumulating knowledge and professional skills, as we get nowadays. It means to learn things which are truly relevant to life and then thoroughly train oneself in and according to that

knowledge. It is a "study" which leads ever more deeply into the heart, as we find when *sikkhā* is analyzed into the elements *sa* (by, for, and in oneself) and *ikkha(to* see)— "to see oneself by oneself,"

Nak means "one who does, one who is skilled at or expert in" a particular activity. *A nak-seuksa* is a "student", but not by virtue of enrolling in a school, putting on a uniform, or carrying books. A true student must *seuksa* in all meanings, aspects, and levels of the word until being expert at *seuksa.* There are no institutions, schedules, or curricula which can contain the genuine student. Being a student is a fundamental duty of all human beings for as long as they breathe.

Lak means "principle, standard, post, bulwark, stake." A *lak* is something we can grab onto-wisely-for stability and safety. Wise students begin their investigations with fundamentals and make sure to be firmly grounded in them before going further. In fact, the real basics are often enough. Identifying the principles which can stake us to the core of our subject is a start. Careful reflection on them leads to understanding. But only by incorporating them into our lives through practice do they become a trustworthy bulwark.

Dhamma * defies translation. It is the core of all spiritual endeavor and all life, even the most mundane. It can mean "thing," "teachings," and "the supreme, absolute Truth." Here, for a practical start, we can emphasize four vital meanings of the word "Dhamma."

> "Nature" — all things, including humanity and all we do, and the natures of those things

> "Law" — the natural law underlying and governing all those things

* *Buddha-Dhamma* means "the Buddha's Dhamma" or the "Dhamma taught by the Buddha, the Awakened One."

"Duty" — the way of living required of each human being, and all other beings, with every breath and at every opportunity, by the law of nature

"Fruit" — the result of duty done correctly according to natural law

These are the ground in which students of the truth of life must stake their principles. And it is the reality to which all study should lead.

Samrab means "for." Dhamma Principles are not floating around in some metaphysical or philosophical twilight zone. They have a clear purpose and practical value. They are for the inspiration and enrichment of students. They are for those people who are curious about life, who want to understand what we are doing here and where we should be going, who are sick of selfishness and misery. They are not, however, to be taken as articles of faith to be believed, memorized, and recited for emotional satisfaction within an illusion of security. They are for study, investigation, experiment, as a means to one's own realization of the truth which is the meaning of human life.

This book covers a variety of topics which are generally obscured or ignored, although they make up the essence of what Buddhism has to offer. When issues such as suffering and emptiness are pushed back into a dim, intangible ambiguity by the scholarly discussions which are all too common in modern Buddhism, Ajahn Buddhadāsa strives to help us see them in our own breathing and living. Where the academics, both Eastern and Western, see theories and philosophies, he sees the tools to live life in truth and peace. His vision and teaching are clear and succinct: we hope that our

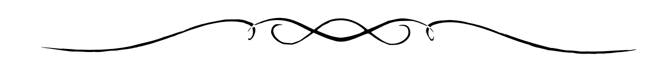
attempts to translate them into English do him and his teachers — the Lord Buddha, Dhamma, life, and suffering — justice.

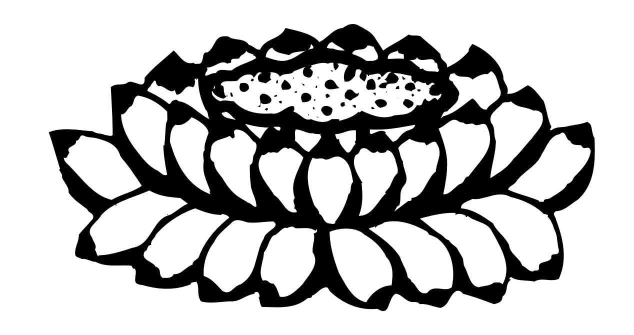
Here are questions which all Dhamma cultivators have asked ourselves at one time or another. Others in turn will ask these questions of us. So it is convenient to have lucid, concise responses handy when we need them. Even better when they are backed up by quotations from the Buddha himself. Best of all when the approach is down-to-earth, leaving aside the mysticism and mythology with which we so often pleasantly distract ourselves. Keeping the investigation — in both this book and our own lives — practical, factual, and straight-forward eliminates the misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and misinformation which generally plague religion. Confronting these truths simply and in daily life will reveal their profundity and liberate us from suffering and the ignorance that causes it.

This little book has been reprinted a few times since Ariyananda Bhikkhu (Rod Bucknell) first translated it. This edition, however, has been revised, first by myself and later with help from Rod. We have corrected minor errors and printing irregularities, and have tried to improve readability, but have not made any major changes. Many of our visitors at Suan Mokkh have helped with suggestions and proof-reading during the preparation of this edition. Unfortunately, their names are too numerous to mention. Lastly, Phra Dusadee Metaṃkuro, Chao Assava, and their friends in The Dhamma Study & Practice Group have overseen business and publication duties. Their kindness and dedication in publishing many valuable Dhamma books, with more on the way, deserves acknowledgement, appreciation, and support.

May the efforts of the many Dhamma comrades which have gone into this book benefit not only their own wisdom and coolness, but that of friends the world over. May this book be read carefully and repeatedly so that the profound truths presented within it will take root in our hearts. May we all study and live in harmony with these truths, thereby quenching all traces of misunderstanding, selfishness, and *dukkha.*

Santikaro Bhikkhu
Suan Mokkhabalārāma
Rains Retreat, 1988





Contents

Fellow Dhamma-followers:

Today's talk is entitled, ***"Dhamma Principles for Students".***

I WISH TO MAKE it clear to you that today's talk will deal only with fundamentals and basic principles, and so is especially intended for students, that is to say, for intelligent people. I shall discuss these broad principles of Dhamma (Natural Truth) using the question-and-answer format, first putting a question to you, and then supplying the answer. Having heard the question first, you will find the answer easier to understand and remember. This, I feel, is the most appropriate method of presentation for you who are students or intelligent people. It is said that at the time of the Buddha, intelligent people never asked about anything but basic points and fundamental principles. They never wanted long-winded explanations. This has the virtue of saving time, among other things.

So that is how I shall do it today: pose a question as our topic, and then answer it in terms of basic principles. In this way you will get the essentials of a large number of topics, facts that will serve you as a good general foundation. Having this foundation knowledge will bear good fruit in the future; it will be of assistance to you in studying and in understanding other speakers.

One more point. The form of my talk is designed to prepare you students for those occasions when you will be asked questions by people from other countries and other religions. It will enable you to answer their questions, and answer them correctly, without giving rise to any misunderstanding concerning the Teaching.

Bear well in mind those points which constitute the essence or real kernel of the subject. If you manage to remember that much, it will be a very good thing, and, I believe, a very great benefit to you all. Now I shall discuss the topics in turn.

1) *Suppose we are asked,*
"What subject did the Buddha teach?

The best way of answering this is to quote the Buddha himself, "Know this, O Monks: Now, as formerly, I teach of only *dukkha* (suffering, unsatisfactoriness) and the elimination of *dukkha."*

Whether or not this answer agrees with what you had thought, please take good note of it. There are many other ways we may answer, but this one saying of the Buddha sums up his teaching very succinctly.

The Buddha taught only *dukkha* and the quenching of it. This renders irrelevant any questions without a direct bearing on the elimination of *dukkha*. Don't consider such questions as "Is there rebirth after death?" or "How does rebirth take place?" These can be considered later.

So, if a Westerner asks us this question, we shall answer it by saying, "The Buddha taught nothing other than *dukkha* and the elimination of it." ♣

2) *Following on this we may be asked,*
"What did he teach in particular"

A) As you can see, this is a big subject which can be answered from many different points of view. If asked this, we can say first of all that he taught us to tread the Middle Way, to be neither too strict nor too slack, to go to neither the one extreme nor the other. On the one hand, we are to avoid the very harsh self-mortification practised in certain yoga schools, which simply creates difficulties and trouble. On the other hand, we must keep away from that way

of practice which allows us sensual pleasures, which amounts to saying, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!" This is an extremely cynical expression appropriate for people interested only in sensual pleasures.

By contrast, the Middle Way consists, on one hand, in not creating hardships for yourself and, on the other hand, not indulging to your heart's content in sensual pleasures. Walking the Middle Way brings about conditions which are in every way conducive to study and practice, and to success in putting an end to *dukkha* (suffering). The expression "Middle Way" can be applied generally in many varied situations. It can't lead you astray. The Middle Way consists in striking the golden mean. Knowing causes, knowing effects, knowing oneself, knowing how much is enough, knowing the proper time, knowing individuals, knowing groups of people: these Seven Noble Virtues constitute walking the Middle Way. This is one way of answering the question,

B) We could answer it equally well by saying that he taught self-help. You all understand what self-help is; you hardly will want it explained. To put it briefly, we are not to rely on fortune and fate. We are not to rely on celestial beings, nor even, finally, on what is called "God". We must help ourselves. To quote the Buddha, "Self is the refuge of self." Even in theistic religions it is said that God helps only those who help themselves. In other religions this matter of self-help may be stated more or less definitely, but in Buddhism it is all important. When one is miserable and, deluded, suffering pain and anguish, then one must turn to the way of self-help. The Buddha said, "Buddhas merely point out the way. Making the effort is something that each individual must do for himself." In other words, Buddhism teaches self-help. Let us bear this in mind.

C) Another way of answering is to say the Buddha taught that everything is caused and conditioned. Everything happens in consequence of causes and conditions, and in accordance with law. This statement is like the answer received by Sariputta when, prior to his entering the Order, he questioned a *bhikkhu* (monk) and was told, "The Buddha teaches thus: Each thing arises from a cause. We must know the cause of that thing and the ceasing of the cause of that thing." This principle of Dhamma is scientific in nature, and we can say that the principles of Buddhism agree with the principles of science. The Buddha did not use individuals or subjective things as criteria; that is to say, Buddhism is a religion of reason.

D) To answer yet another way, as a rule of practice, the Buddha taught, "Avoid evil, do good, purify the mind." Those three together are called the *"Ovāda pāṭimokkha"*, meaning the "summary of all exhortations". Avoid evil, do good, purify the mind. Avoiding evil and doing good need no explaining, but making the mind pure isn't as obvious. If one goes about grasping and clinging, even to goodness, the mind develops impurities: fear of not receiving good, fear of being deprived of existing good, anxiety, worry, and attaching to this and that as "mine". All of these produce suffering. Even though we may have successfully avoided evil and done good, we still must know how to render the mind free. Do not grasp at or cling to anything as being a self or as belonging to a self. Otherwise it will be misery, it will be a heavy burden and it will be suffering *(dukkha)*. In other words, grasping and clinging, like carrying something along with one all the time, is a heavy weight and a burden of suffering. Even a load of precious gems carried on the shoulders or head is just as heavy as a load of rocks. So don't carry rocks or gems *(dukkha)*. Put them aside. Don't let there be any weight on

your head (which here means the mind). This is what is meant by "purify the mind". So then, to purify the mind is the third thing. The first thing is to avoid evil, the second is to do good, and the third is to make the mind pure. This is what he taught.

E) Here is another important teaching, a worthwhile reminder. He taught, "All compounded things (all things and all beings in this world) are perpetually flowing, forever breaking up (they are impermanent). Let all be well-equipped with heedfulness!" Please listen very carefully to these words: everything in this world is perpetually flowing, forever breaking up, that is, all is impermanent. So we have to equip ourselves well with heedfulness. Don't go playing with these things! They will bite you. They will slap your face. They will bind and hold you fast. You will be made to sit and weep, or perhaps even to commit suicide.

Now let us bring together these various ways of answering this one question. If asked just what the Buddha taught, answer with one of the following:

> He taught us to walk the Middle Way;
>
> He taught self-help;
>
> He taught us to be familiar with the law off causality and to adjust the causes appropirately for the desired results to follow;
>
> He taught as the principle of practice "Avoid evil, do good, purify the mind";
>
> And he reminded us that all compounded things are impermanent and perpetually flowing, and that we must be well-equipped with heedfulness.

There are several different ways of answering this question. If asked what the Buddha taught, then answer in any one of these ways. ♣

3) *Now, suppose you meet a person from another country who asks you,*

"Put as briefly as possible, what is the basic message of Buddhism?"

THIS CAN BE answered in one short sentence, a saying of the Buddha himself: "Nothing whatsoever should be grasped at or clung to."

That nothing should be grasped at or clung to is a handy maxim from the mouth of the Buddha himself. We don't need to waste time in searching through the *Tipiṭaka* (the recorded Teaching), because this one short statement puts it all quite clearly. In all the discourses, in the entire teaching, there are as many as eighty-four thousand Dhamma topics, all of which may be summed up in the single sentence, "nothing should be grasped at." This tells us that to grasp at things and cling to them is suffering *(dukkha).* When we have come to Know this, we can be said to know all the utterances of the Buddha, the entire eighty-four thousand Dhamma topics. And to have put this into practice is to have practised Dhamma completely, in its every phase and aspect.

The reason a person fails to keep to the rules of conduct is that he grasps at and clings to things. If he refrains from grasping at and clinging to anything whatever, and puts aside craving and aversion, he cannot fail to keep the rules of conduct. The reason a person's mind is distracted and unable to concentrate is that he is grasping

at and clinging to something. The reason a person lacks insight is the same. When he is finally able to practise non-grasping, then simultaneously he attains the Noble Paths, their Fruits, and ultimately *nibbāna* (Sanskrit, *nirvāna).*

The Buddha was a man who grasped at absolutely nothing. The Dhamma teaches the practice and the fruit of the practice of non-grasping. The Sangha (Community of Noble Disciples) consists of people who practise non-grasping, some who are in the process of practising, and some who have completed the practice. This is what the Sangha is.

When people asked the Buddha whether his entire teaching could be summarized in a single sentence, he answered that it could, and said, "Nothing whatsoever should be grasped at or clung to." ♣

4) *Now suppose you are then asked,*

"How is this non-grasping and non-clinging to be put into practice?"

If you meet a person from another country who asks by what means one may practise the essence of Buddhism, you can once again answer by quoting the Buddha. We don't have to answer with our own ideas. The Buddha explained how to practise in succinct and complete terms. When seeing a visual object, just see it. When hearing a sound with the ear, just hear it. When smelling an odour with the nose, just smell it. When tasting something by way of the tongue, just taste it. When experiencing a tactile sensation by way of the general skin and body sense, just experience

that sensation. And when a mental object, such as some defiling thought, arises in the mind, just know it; know that defiling mental object.

Let us go over it again for those of you who have never heard this before. When seeing, just see! If at all possible, in seeing, just see. When listening, just hear; when smelling an odour, just smell the odour; in tasting, just taste; in detecting a tactile sensation by the way of skin and body, just experience that sensation; and on the arising of a mental object in the mind, just be aware of it. This means that these are not to be added to by the arising of the self-idea. The Buddha taught that if one can practise like this, the "self" will cease to exist; and the non-existence of the "self" is the cessation of suffering *(dukkha).*

"Viewing an object by way of the eye, just see it." This needs explaining. When objects make contact with the eye, observe and identify them; know what action has to be taken with whatever is seen. But don't permit liking or disliking to arise. If you permit the arising of liking, you will desire; if you permit the arising of disliking, you will want to destroy. Thus it is that there are likers and haters. This is what is called "the self". To go the way of the self is suffering and deception. If an object is seen, let there be intelligence and awareness. Don't allow your mental defilements to compel you to grasp and cling. Cultivate enough intelligence to know which line of action is right and appropriate. And if no action is required, ignore the object. If some sort of result is wanted from this thing, then proceed, with full awareness and intelligence, not giving birth to the self-idea. In this way you get the results you wanted and no suffering arises. This is a very concise principle of practice, and it should be regarded as a most excellent one.

The Buddha taught: When seeing, just see. When hearing,

just hear. When smelling an odour, just smell it. When tasting, just taste. When experiencing a tactile sensation, just experience it. When sensing a mental object, just sense it. Let things stop right there and insight will function automatically. Take the course that is right and fitting. Don't give birth to "the liker" or "the hater", and so to the desire to act in accordance with that liking or disliking, which is the arising of selfhood. Such a mind is turbulent, it is not free, it functions without any insight at all. This is what the Buddha taught.

Why, then, didn't we mention morality, concentration, insight, merit-making, or alms-giving in connection with the most fruitful practice? These are helpful conditions, but they are not the heart of Dhamma, not the essential matter. We make merit, give alms, observe morality, develop concentration, and gain insight in order to become stable persons. When seeing, just to see; when hearing, just to hear. Achieving this, we become stable people. We have stability, unshakeability, and equilibrium. Although objects of every kind make contact with us in every way and by every sensory route, self does not arise. Merit-making and alms-giving are means for getting rid of self. Observing morality is a process by which we gain mastery over self, as is concentration practice. Acquiring insight serves to destroy self. Here we are not speaking of several different matters; we are speaking of one urgent everyday matter. Our eyes see this and that, our ears hear this and that, our nose smells odours, and so on for all six sense channels. We have to stand on guard, keeping a constant watch at the entrances of the six channels. This single practice covers all practices. It is the very essence of Dhamma practice. If you meet a person from another country who asks how to practise, answer in this way.

5) *Suppose someone from another country or religion asks you,*

"Where can one learn, where can one study?"

We answer this by quoting the Buddha once again, "In this very fathom-long body together with the perceptions and the mental activities." Learn in the human body together with perception and mental activity. This fathom-long body, being alive, is accompanied by perceptions and mental activities, all of which make up "the person". The presence of consciousness implies the presence of perceptions, and the presence of mental activities that of knowledge and thought.

In this fathom-long body together with perceptions and mental activities the Tathāgata (the Buddha) made known the world, the origin of the world, the complete extinction of the world, and the way to practise in order to achieve the complete extinction of the world. When he spoke of the origin of the world, the complete extinction of the world, and the way of practice leading to complete extinction of the world, he meant that the whole Dhamma is to be found within the body and the mind. Learn here. Don't learn in a school, in a cave, in a forest, on a mountain, or in a monastery. Those places are outside us. Build a school inside, build a university within the body. Then examine, study, investigate, research, scout around, find out the truth about how the world arises, how it comes to be a source of suffering, how there may be complete extinction of the world (that is, extinction of suffering), and how to work towards attaining that complete extinction. That is, rediscover the Four Noble Truths yourself. The Enlightened One sometimes used the word "world" and sometimes the word "suffering" *(dukkha)*. The nature of the world, of suffering; the nature of its

arising, its origin and source; the nature of its complete extinction, the cessation of suffering and the turbulent world; and the nature of the practice which leads to *dukkha's* end: these can be searched for and found in this body and nowhere else. If one appears to have found it elsewhere, it can only be as an account in some book, hearsay, just words, and not the Truth itself. However, when it is looked for and found in this fathom-long body, together with this mind, then it will be the Truth.

So if asked where to learn, say, "We learn in this fathom-long body, together with perception and the mental activities." ♣

6) *Now we may be asked next, for the sake of better understanding of the Dhamma,*

"To what may the Dhamma be compared?"

The Buddha said, "The Dhamma may be compared to a raft." He used the word "raft" because in those days rafts were commonly used for crossing rivers, and this explanation of the Dharnma as a raft could be readily understood. This has a very important meaning. One should not become so attached to the Dhamma that one forgets oneself, that one becomes proud of being a teacher, a scholar, or a man of learning. If one forgets that the Dhamma is just a raft, this danger will arise. The Dhamma is a raft, a vehicle that will carry us across to the other bank. Having reached the further shore and gone up on land, we should not be so foolish as to carry the raft along with us.

This is meant to teach us to recognize and use the Dhamma as merely a means to an end, not to grasp at and cling to it to the point

of forgetting ourselves. If we don't recognize the true function of this raft, we may find ourselves keeping it for show or as something to quarrel over. Sometimes it is regarded as a race to be run, which is wasteful and useless. It should be used as intended, for crossing over, for crossing the stream. Knowledge of Dhamma should be used to cross over beyond suffering. It should not be retained for detrimental purposes, for fighting with that sharp-edged weapon the tongue, for arguing, or as an object of ceremonial obeisance. Finally, don't grasp at and cling to it so that, even after having reached the shore, having landed, you are not willing to leave the raft behind., but want to carry if along with you. ♣

7) *This Dhamma, which is said to resemble a raft, is just as applicable for lay people as it is for bhikkhus (monks). Suppose, then, that we are asked,*

"What should a lay person study?"

We should not waste time thinking out our own answer. If anyone wants to have his own ideas, well and good, there is nothing to stop him. But if we are to answer in accordance with what the Buddha taught, then we must say, "Lay people should study all the *suttantas,* that is, the discourses of the Tathāgata about *suññatā* (emptiness)."

These *suttantas* are a well-organized exposition of the teaching. They constitute a good system forming the pithy substance or heart of the teaching. This is why they are called *suttanta.* A *sutta* is a "discourse" and *anta* means "end". Hence, a *suttanta* is a dis-

course that is well set out, well ordered, and the sound kernel of the subject. It is like the word *vedanta. Veda* is "knowledge"; *vedanta* is knowledge that is the pure substance of the matter, well set out and systematically arranged.

Remember this word *suttanta.* All the *suttantas* are utterances of the Tathāgata. They are what the Buddha taught and they all refer to *suññatā* (emptiness). In this connection, lay people ask how they are to practise Dhamma in order to achieve the most enduring benefits and happiness. The Buddha said, "The *suttantas* are utterances of the Tathāgata, are of great profundity, have deep significance, are the means of transcending the world, and refer to *suññatā.*"

This word *suññatā* may seem strange to you, but don't lose heart just yet, because it happens to be the most important word in Buddhism. Please listen carefully. The word *suññatā* may be translated as "emptiness". But the word "empty" has several usages and meanings. The *suññatā* of the Buddha does not mean physical emptiness, it is not a physical vacuum devoid of material substance. No! Here it is a case of emptiness in the sense of essential nature, because all sorts of things are still present. There can be as many objects as would fill up the whole world, but the Buddha taught that they are empty, or have the property of emptiness, because there is nothing in any of them that either is a self or belongs to a self. The aim of this is, once again, non-clinging to any thing at all. Lay people should study in particular those sayings of the Buddha that deal with *suññatā.* Generally, this subject has been misunderstood as too lofty for lay people. The reason for this is simply that too few people wish to practise according to these sayings of the Buddha. So please keep clearly in mind that even a lay person must study about, practise, and then discover *suññatā.* It is not only for *bhikkhus.*

I hope, then, that you lay people will no longer be afraid of the word *"suññatā"* or of the subject of *suññatā*. Take steps to increase your knowledge and understanding of it. *Suññatā* is a subject requiring intricate and delicate explanation; it takes a long time. For the reason, we have discussed only the actual core of the matter, just the real essence of it and that is enough, namely, emptiness of the idea of being a self or belonging to a self. If the mind realizes that there is nothing that is a self and that there is nothing that belongs to a self, the mind is "empty" and free. "This world is empty" means just this. ♣

8) *Now suppose we are asked about the supreme word in Buddhism,*

"What is the *amatadhamma*?"

AMATA MEANS "DEATHLESS"; the *amatadhamma* is the dhamma (thing or state) that does not die. And what is that? The Buddha once said, "The cessation of greed, hatred, and delusion is the *amatadhamma.* "The *amatadhamma* is the immortal state, or the immortalizing state. Wherever there is greed, hatred, and delusion, that is called the mortal state.

One experiences suffering. One has the self-idea, which causes one to be subject to birth, aging, disease, and death. When greed, hatred, and delusion cease (the ceasing of delusion being the ceasing of ignorance and misunderstanding), then there no longer arises the false concept of selfhood, then there is no more self to die. So if one is searching for the deathless state, the *amatadhamma,* one must search for the state or condition that is free of greed, hatred,

and delusion. This is what the Buddha taught. The *amatadhamma,* as we have so frequently heard, is the ultimate, the highest teaching of Buddhism. The "undying" taught by other teachers is a different *amata.* But in Buddhism it is, as I have just explained, the cessation of greed, hatred, and delusion. ♣

9) *The things which are linked with the highest and most profound Dhamma (Truth) are known by various names. Suppose someone raises the question:*

"What is the Dhamma that is highest and most profound, that transcends the world and death in all their forms?

The Buddha called it *suññatāppaṭisaṃyuttā* which means "Dhamma that treats of *suññatā",* or even *"suññatā"* itself. Dhamma that treats of *suññatā* is Dhamma at its highest and most profound. It transcends the world, transcends death, and is none other than the *amatadhamma* (the immortal dhamma).

Now, the newer, later versions of Dhamma — what are they like?

The Buddha said, "A discourse of any kind, of any class; though produced by a poet or a learned man; though versified, poetical, splendid, and melodious in sound and syllable; is not in keeping with the teaching if it is not connected with *suññatā."* Please remember the important words "not connected with *suññatā".* Therefore, if a discourse is not concerned with *suññatā,* it must be

an utterance of a later disciple, an innovation, new Dhamma, not an utterance of the Accomplished One, and as such inferior. If it is a saying of a disciple and does not treat of *ssuññatā,* it is outside the Teaching.

If we wish to find out Dhamma which is true to the original highest teaching of the Buddha, there is no possible way other than through those accounts that refer to *suññatā* (emptiness). ♣

10) *Now suppose you are asked by a person from another country,*

"Which aspect of the teaching, as recorded in the Pali Texts, did the Buddha stress most of all?"

ANSWER ONCE AGAIN by quoting the Buddha. "The five *khandhas* are impermanent and not-self *(anattā)."* These five *khandhas* are the five aggregates into which an "individual" is divisible. The body aggregate is called *rṃpa;* the aggregate of feeling, both pleasurable and painful, is called *vedanā;* memory and perception is called *saññā;* active thinking is called *sankhāra;* and the consciousness that can know this or that object by way of the six senses is *viññāṇa. Rūpa, vedanā, saññā, sankhāra, viññāṇa:* these five are called the five aggregates or *khandhas.* These five aggregates are impermanent and devoid of selfhood. This is the aspect of the doctrine that the Buddha stressed most of all. These five aggregates are impermanent, continually flowing, and continually changing. They are devoid of selfhood; because they are perpetually flowing, no one can consider them to be "me" or "mine".

I shall summarize it once again. Keep this brief statement in

mind. The Buddha stressed more than any other the teaching that all things are impermanent and that nothing can be considered to be "me" or "mine". ♣

11) *Now the next thing we shall examine is this:* "Whom did the Buddha teach that we should believe?"

If you are asked this, then answer with the Buddha's advice from the *Kālāma Sutta.* We are to believe what we clearly see for ourselves to be the case. Now it is necessary to understand what is meant by the expression "seeing clearly". It means seeing clearly without needing to use reasoning, without needing to speculate, without needing to make assumptions. We should see, as clearly as we see in the case of a present physical object, that, taking this and doing this, this effect is produced. This is the meaning of "seeing clearly". There is no need to rely on reasoning or supposition. In Buddhism, we are taught not to believe anyone, not to believe anything, without having seen clearly for ourselves that the truth in question is so.

We can see what is meant here from the following questions. Why are we warned not to believe the *Tipiṭaka* (the Buddhist Canon)? not to believe a teacher? not to believe what is reported or rumoured? not to believe what has been reasoned out? not to believe what has been arrived at by means of logic? The principles are a help towards right understanding, because all blind credulity is foolishness. Suppose we were to open the *Tipiṭaka* and read some passage and then believe it without thinking, without testing it, without any critical examination. This would be foolish belief

in the *Tipiṭaka,* which the Buddha condemned. Believing what a teacher says without having used our eyes and ears, without criticizing, and without having seen for ourselves that what he says is really so, this is what is meant here by "believing a teacher". It is the same with believing any report or rumour that happens to arise. "Believing in what has been arrived at by way of logic" means that, having learn how to reason correctly and being experienced in reasoning we come to the conclusion that a certain proposition must be logically so. But this is still not good enough; we are not to put our trust in this sort of reasoning.

But here we must be careful and take good note that this discourse does not forbid us to read the *Tipiṭaka*. Nor does it forbid us to consult a teacher, to listen to reports and rumours, or to use logical reasoning. Rather it means that although we may have read, listened, and heard, we should not simply accept what is offered in these ways unless we have first thought it over, considered it carefully, fathomed it out, examined fully, and seen clearly for ourselves that it really is so.

For instance, the Buddha taught that greed, anger, and delusion are the causes that give rise to suffering. If we ourselves are not yet acquainted with greed, anger, and delusion, then there is no way that we can believe this, there is no need to believe it, and to believe it would, in such a case, be foolish. But when we know ourselves what greed is like, what anger is like, and what delusion is like; and that whenever they arise in the mind, they produce suffering as if they were fires burning us; then we can believe on the basis of our own experience.

So what the Buddha taught in this connection appears in the *Tipiṭaka* as follows. Having read or having heard something, we must investigate until we have seen clearly the fact being taught.

If still we don't see it clearly, we must fall back on reasoning and then leave it for a while. So to start with, we shall believe and practise no more than we have seen clearly to be the case. Then gradually, we shall come to believe and see more and more clearly. This is a very popular teaching of the Buddha. If someone from another country asks you about it, do explain it properly. If you explain it wrongly, you may misrepresent the Buddha's teaching. Not believing the *Tipiṭaka,* not believing the teacher, not believing reports and rumours, not believing reasoning by way of logic — these have a hidden meaning. We must search for it. To believe straight away is foolishness. The Buddha condemned this firmly and definitely. He told us not to believe until we have put it to the test and have come to see it clearly. Then we may believe.

To believe straight away is foolishness; to believe after having seen clearly is good sense. That is the Buddhist policy on belief: not to believe stupidly, not relying only on people, text-books, conjecture, reasoning, or whatever the majority believes, but rather to believe what we see clearly for ourselves to be the case. This is how it is in Buddhism. We Buddhists make it our policy. ♣

12) *Next the question,*

"How do the minds of an ordinary lay person and a true Buddhist differ?"

Now we shall look at a point which will give some idea of the difference in level between the mind of an ordinary lay person and the mind of a true Buddhist. "Ordinary lay person" means one who has never been a proper Buddhist and knows nothing of

real and genuine Buddhism. An ordinary lay person is a Buddhist at most by name, only according to the records and according to the register, through having been born of parents who were Buddhists. This means he is still an ordinary lay person. Now, to be a "true Buddhist", to be an *ariyan* (one well advanced in practice, a noble one) a person must meet the requirement of having right understanding about the various things around him to a far higher degree than the ordinary lay person has.

The Buddha said humorously, "Between the view of the *ariyan* and the view of ordinary lay people there is an enormous difference." Thus, in the view of the *ariyans,* in the *ariyan* discipline, singing songs is the same thing as weeping; dancing is the antics of madmen; and hearty laughing is the behaviour of immature children. The ordinary lay person sings, laughs, and enjoys himself without noticing when he is weary. In the discipline of the *ariyans,* singing is looked upon as being the same as weeping. If we observe a man who sings and shouts at the top of his voice, it not only looks the same as weeping, but, furthermore, it stems from the same emotional conditions as does weeping. As for dancing, this is the behaviour of madmen! If we are just a little observant, we will realize as we are getting up to dance, that we must surely be at least ten percent crazy or else we couldn't do it. But because it is universally considered something pleasant, we don't see it as the behaviour of lunatics. Some people like to laugh; laughter is something enjoyable. people laugh a lot, even when it is not reasonable or appropriate. But laughing is regarded by the *ariyan,* and in their discipline, as the behaviour of immature children. So if we could laugh less, it would be a good thing, and not to laugh at all would be even better.

These are illustrations of the way in which the *ariyan* discipline

differs from the traditions of ordinary lay people. According to the traditions of ordinary people, singing, dancing, and laughing are of no consequence and are normal events, while in the *ariyan* discipline they are looked upon as pathetic and evaluated accordingly. Such is the view of one whose mind is highly developed.

The Buddha is not saying, do not do such things when we want to, but only wants us to know that there are higher and lower ways to behave, and that we need not do unnecessary things. When we are not yet *ariyans,* we may want to try out such lower forms of behaviour. If we do give them a try, we will realize that they are sometimes amusing, but in the end we'll get tired of them. Then we can raise ourselves to the level and discipline of the *ariyans.*

Some people don't like to hear about "discipline". They worry that restraining themselves might lead to *dukkha.* However, trying to control oneself in order not to follow one's moods is an important principle in Buddhism. To hold down the body and mind so that they don't follow such moods is not *dukkha.* Rather, this is the way to defeat *dukkha.* We must find means to avoid falling under the oppression of selfish feelings or defilements. We should set our minds to not allowing the defilements to incite and master us. Take a look at dancing and see how much the defilements goad us and master us and have us in their control. Is this freedom?

It then occurs to us that we ought to improve our status somewhat. Don't be an ordinary lay person forever! Apply for admission into the society of the Buddha, that is, have knowledge, intelligence, awareness, and understanding, so that suffering may be diminished. Avoid making things unnecessarily hard and fruitless for yourself. This is the reward you will reap; you will rise from the level of the ordinary lay person to become a true Buddhist, an *ariyan* dwelling in the *ariyan* discipline. The Buddha hoped there would come

to be many *ariyans,* many who would not remain ordinary worldlings forever. ♣

13) *Now I am going to talk about the Path. Suppose you are asked,*

"Which way of practice constitutes walking the ordinary path and which the shortest and quickest path?"

We might answer "The Noble Eightfold Path" — of which you have already heard — namely, right understanding, right aim, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This is called the Noble Eightfold Path. It has a most orderly arrangement which can be grouped under the aspects of morality, concentration, and insight. It forms a great system of practice, which we refer to as walking the ordinary path. It is for people who cannot take the quicker path. It is not a wrong path, it is the right path; however, it is on the ordinary level and takes a long time.

The Buddha has taught a short cut as well. He said that when we do not grasp at the six sense organs *(āyatanas)* and the things associated with them as being self-entities, then the Noble Eightfold Path will simultaneously arise of its own accord in all of its eight aspects. This is a most important and fundamental principle of Dhamma.

First of all, we must recall that the six sense organs *(āyatanas)* are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Each of these six organs has five aspects. In the case of the eye, the first aspect is the

eye itself; the second is the visual object that makes contact with the eye; the third is the consciousness *(viññāṇa)* that comes to know that visual object making contact with the eye; the fourth is the action of contact *(phassa)* effected between consciousness, eye, and visual object; and the fifth is the pleasurable or painful mental feeling *(vedanā)* that may arise as a result of the contact. There are five aspects. The eye has these five aspects. The ear has five also, the nose has five, and so on. Each one of these plays a part in causing us to become unmindful and to grasp at something as being self. Thus we grasp at the consciousnessness that comes to know and see via the eye. Because we can be aware of it, we jump to the conclusion that it must be a self. In this way we grasp at and cling to eye-consciousness as being the self, or grasp at eye-contact (fourth aspect) as self, or cling to eye-contact-feeling (fifth aspect), whether pleasant or unpleasant, as self. Sometimes it happens that a melodious sound comes to the ear, and we grasp at the awareness of the melody as being a self. Sometimes a tasty flavour comes to the tongue, and we may grasp at the awareness of tastiness as being a self.

Each of the six sense organs has five aspects, making altogether thirty aspects. Any of these can be grasped at as being a self, clung to with the greatest ease many times over in a single day. As soon as we grasp and cling, suffering results. We have erred and have enmeshed ourselves in a mass of suffering. This is not walking the Path. The Buddha, however, taught us not to grasp at the six sense organs and the things connected with them. By keeping constant watch, we shall come to see that none of them is a self, and the Noble Eightfold Path will exist in us at that very same moment. At that moment there will exist right understanding, right aim, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness,

and right concentration. To practise non-grasping at the six sense organs is to cause the entire Eightfold Path to arise immediately. The Buddha considered this a short cut.

In one of his discourses the Buddha taught the quickest short cut — emptiness. Not to hold that there is selfhood regarding eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind causes the arising of the entire Noble Eightfold Path in a single moment. If we do not decide to take the short cut, then we study the Noble Eightfold Path of morality, concentration, and wisdom (insight). To practise it from the very beginning, going gradually and by slow degrees, uses up much time. So we find that in Buddhism there is an ordinary way and there is a short cut. ♣

14) *Now I shall say something on* **kamma** *in Buddhism, by asking,*

"What role does *kamma* play in Buddhism?

Many Westerners have written books on Buddhism, and they **seem** to be most proud of the chapters dealing with *kamma* (Sanskrit, *karma)* and rebirth. But their explanations are wrong, quite wrong every time. Those Westerners set out to explain *kamma,* but all they really say is that good *kamma* is good and evil *kamma* is evil. "Do good, receive good; do evil, receive evil", and nothing more, is exactly the same doctrine as is found in every religion. This is not *kamma* as it is taught in Buddhism.

With rebirth it is the same. They make their assertions just as if they had seen with their own eyes the very same individuals being reborn. This misrepresents the Buddha's main message, which

teaches the non-existence of "the individual", of "the self". Even though "I" am sitting here now, yet there is no individual to be found. When there is no individual, what is there to die? What is there to be reborn? The Buddha taught the non-existence of "the individual", of "the person". Thus, birth and death are matters of relative truth. The writers of books entitled "Buddhism" generally explain *kamma* and rebirth quite wrongly.

Do pay close attention to this matter of *kamma*. To be the Buddhist account it must deal with the cessation of *kamma,* not just with *kamma* itself and its effects — as found in all religions. To be the Buddha's teaching it must deal with the cessation of *kamma.*

A sabbakammakkhayaṃ-patto is one who has attained the cessation of all *kamma*. The Buddha taught that *kamma* ceases with the ceasing of lust, hatred, and delusion *(rāga, dosa,* and *moha).* This is easy to remember. *Kamma* ceases when lust, hatred, and delusion cease, that is, when the mental defilements cease. If lust, hatred, and delusion do not cease, *kamma* does not cease. When lust, hatred, and delusion do cease, old *kamma* ceases, no present *kamma* is produced, and no new future *kamma* is produced — thus *kamma* past, present, and future ceases. When a person puts an end to lust, hatred, and delusion, *kamma* ceases. This is how it must be explained. Only such an account of *kamma* can be called the Buddhist account.

So we find there is a third kind of *kamma.* Most people know of only the first and second kinds of *kamma,* good and evil *kamma*. They don't know yet what the third kind of *kamma* is. The Buddha called the first kind of *kamma* black or evil *kamma,* and the second kind white or good *kamma*. The kind of *kamma* that can be called neither-black-nor-white is that which puts an end to both black *kamma* and white *kamma*. This third kind of *kamma* is a

tool for putting a complete stop to both black and white *kamma*. The Buddha used these terms "black *kamma*", "white *kamma*", and "*kamma* neither-black-nor-white". This third type of *kamma* is *kamma* in the Buddhist sense, *kamma* according to Buddhist principles. As has been said, to put an end to lust, hatred, and delusion is to put an end to *kamma*. Thus, the third kind of *kamma* is the ending of lust, hatred, and delusion; in other words, it is the Noble Eightfold Path. Whenever we behave and practise in accordance with the Noble Eightfold Path, that is the third type of *kamma*. It is neither black nor white; rather it brings to an end black *kamma* and white *kamma*. It is world-transcending *(lokuttara)*, above good and above evil.

This third type of *kamma* is never discussed by Westerners in their chapters on "*Kamma* and Rebirth". They get it all wrong; what they expound is not Buddhism at all. To be Buddhist, they should deal with the third type of *kamma*, the *kamma* that is capable of bringing to an end lust, hatred, and delusion. Then the whole lot of old *kamma* — black *kamma* and white *kamma* — ends as well.

Now let us say something more about this third kind of *kamma*. In this connection the Buddha said, "I came to a clear realization of this through my own sublime wisdom." This teaching of the distinctly different, third type of *kamma* was not taken over by the Awakened One from any existing creed or religion. It is something he came to know with his own insight and then taught to all. So we ought to keep in mind that the teaching of this third type of *kamma* is the real Buddhist teaching on *kamma*. Any manual on *kamma* in Buddhism, any book entitled "*Kamma* and Rebirth", ought to be written on these lines. Do study closely and take an interest in the Buddhist explanation of *kamma*. That account of good and bad *kamma* is found in all religions. Buddhism has it too.

It tells us that doing good is good and doing evil is evil. They all teach the same thing. But the Buddha said that merely producing good *kamma* does not extinguish mental suffering completely and absolutely, because one goes right on being infatuated by and grasping at good *kamma.* In other words, good *kamma* still causes one to go round in the cycle of birth and death, albeit in good states of existence. It is not complete quenching, coolness, *nibbāna.*

So there is a *kamma* taught exclusively by the Buddha, a third type that does away with all *kamma* and makes an end of lust, hatred, and delusion. It is through this third type of *kamma* that one attains *nibbāna.* ♣

15) *I wish now to direct your attention to a matter in which I feel you should be particularly interested. I shall put the question,*

"Would a person necessarily have to have heard the Buddha-Dhamma from the Buddha himself in order to be able to put an end to suffering?"

There have been some who have argued vehemently that we should have heard the Dhamma from the Buddha himself, that only then could we really understand. But the Buddha himself said that there were some who, though they had not heard the Dhamma directly from him, would still be able to walk the right path. There were some who, not having heard it from the Buddha, would nevertheless, through continuous reflection, consideration, and study, through constant observation and practice, be able to walk the right path.

So we ought to raise our hands in homage and immerse our-

selves in the sincerity of the Buddha that he did not make the Dhamma his own monopoly, that he did not set himself up as indispensable. ♣

16) *Here is a question which asks,*

"If doubt arises as to whether a certain teaching is the Buddha's or not, how can we settle the matter?"

The Buddha laid down a principle for testing: examine and measure against the *Suttas* (discourses), compare with the *Vinaya* (discipline). This principle is based on not believing anything second hand and not taking anyone else as an authority. If doubt arises concerning a certain statement of some person who claims to have heard it from the Buddha or from a learned group of elders, which he says leads to the cessation of suffering, the Buddha said that it must be tested in two ways:

(1) Examine and measure it against the *suttas.* The *suttas* are a setting out of the various discourses which constitute a distinct line. If an utterance will not fit to this line, it must be discarded.

(2) Compare it with the *Vinaya.* The *Vinaya* is an exemplary model, a standard, a fixed system. If the utterance in question will not fit to the system, if it does not conform with the *Vinaya,* then discard it.

Don't trust any *bhikkhu,* nor any section of Sangha, nor any group of elders, nor any group of learned and practised individuals who

claim to have heard such and such from the Buddha. The Buddha always asked that we, before all else, raise a doubt and investigate. Then measure it against the *Suttas,* does it fit? Compare with the *Vinaya,* does it conform?

This is a means of ensuring that, though Buddhism lasts two thousand years, three thousand years, five thousand years, however many thousands or tens of thousands of years, if this principle remains in use, the religion or *Dhamma-Vinaya* cannot in any way become distorted or confused. So it is an extremely useful principle. It is called the Great Standard. It is a teaching of the Buddha laying down the use of testing things against the *Suttas* and the *Vinaya.* He did not mention the *Abhidhamma* (the last "basket" of the Pali Canon). ♣

17) *Now we are going to talk about people. We are going to have a closer look at ourselves.*

"What did the Buddha say people would be like in succeeding ages?"

There is a discourse in which the Buddha reproves "us people now", meaning each new generation from the time of the Buddha until now, who "rejoice in unrighteous pleasures, are too much given to covetousness, and are leaning towards false doctrines." They find great delight in pleasurable excitement of an unrighteous kind, that is to say, they are far too self-centred. They completely lack awareness, and thus their greed has become intense and excessive. They fall into false doctrines, because they have fallen completely under the power of the mental defilements.

The Buddha made this statement more than two thousand

years ago, yet he uses the term "people of later ages", which extends from when the Master made the observation until the present day. Here we have a duty to look at ourselves in this present age. Aren't people in the world today taking excessive delight in unrighteous pleasures, behaving far too selfishly, and leaning towards false doctrines? Obviously people at present are very different from people at the time of the Buddha. However, if they are to live correctly according to the pattern set by the Buddha, then, although they may take some pleasure in colours, shapes, sounds, scents, and tastes, they will do so with constant mindfulness and right knowledge, and will not let greed become excessive. This means that they will not want the colours, shapes, sounds, scents, tastes, and tactile stimuli more than is necessary, not excessively. The single word "excess", that is to say, more than necessary, signifies the cause of all the upsets, difficulties, and troubles of the world at this time.

I have read that in Christianity a person who seeks beyond what is needed is "sinful", is a "sinner". One who merely seeks after more than is necessary is considered by Christian standards to be a sinner. Perhaps we don't yet consider ourselves sinners, because we don't care to or because we really consider ourselves not as yet excessive? Perhaps we think that there is nothing about which we are excessive? This matter can be discussed only with people who are honest with themselves.

In a very good Tibetan book of parables, all the birds assemble together. They voice their opinions and express their thoughts on the way of Dhamma practice that will bring happiness. Each variety of bird speaks its own mind. In the end, all the birds assembled resolve that, "We will not seek food in excess of what is necessary. This is the ultimate." Finally, they request the whole gathering not to seek more food than necessary. Here the story ends.

One ought to consider that seeking more than one needs is a source of suffering and torment for oneself and a source of trouble to other people all over the world. Think it over! Leaning towards false doctrines means recognizing a thing as wrong, yet wanting that wrong thing without feeling fear or shame, because defilements preponderate and overwhelm one. A person confirmed in this way of thinking is badly fitted to Dhamma. He is by nature directly opposed to it. So if we want to be free of suffering, we must turn to Dhamma. ♣

18) *Now we shall say something about the Buddha. The question has been asked,*

"To whom did the Buddha pay homage?"

The Buddha's own answer was that he paid homage to the Dhamma and he paid homage to a Sangha community with exemplary qualities. A Sangha community who conduct themselves well and practise properly can be said to possess exemplary qualities. So the Buddha respected the Dhamma and a Sangha community of exemplary qualities. We ought to give thought to the fact that even the Buddha himself paid homage to the Dhamma, and if all the members of a community of *bhikkhus* conducted themselves well and behaved properly as a group, the Buddha paid homage to them as well.

This can be applied to behaviour at the present time, in our own country Thailand or anywhere in the world. This means we ought to respect the Dhamma. If even the most exalted person paid respect to the training rules and communities that practised well, surely so should we. ♣

19) "Where can we find the Buddha?"

The Buddha said, "Any person who sees the Dhamma sees the Tathāgata. Any person who sees not the Dhamma sees not the Tathāgata. One who sees not the Dhamma, though he grasp at the robe of the Tathāgata and hold it fast, cannot be said to see the Tathāgata." "Tathāgata" is the word generally used by the Buddha to refer to himself.

This means that the Buddha is not to be found in the outward physical body. Rather, he is to be found in that high quality in the heart of the Buddha which is called Dhamma. That is the part that must be seen before we can say that we have found the Buddha.

When we prostrate ourselves before the Buddha's image, we dwell on the image, seeing beyond it to the physical body of the Buddha, which the image represents. Then we look beyond the physical body of the Buddha to his mind, and look beyond his mind until we penetrate to the high qualities present in his mind. We see those qualities as the pure, radiant, peaceful Dhamma, devoid of grasping and clinging, perfectly free. Then we can be said to have found the Buddha. ♣

20) "Does the Buddha exist at this moment or not?"

If we are asked this question, we can answer it with this saying of the Buddha, "O Ānanda, the Dhamma and the Discipline, which the Tathāgata has taught and demonstrated, let them be your teacher when I have passed away."

Even now we are studying Dhamma and Discipline, practising Dhamma and Discipline, deriving the benefits of Dhamma and

Discipline. Thus, the Teacher still exists. This stanza is well known because it was spoken by the Buddha as he was about to pass away. Please take special note that it tells us that the Teacher still exists. ♧

21) "Did the Buddha bring about the cessation of his *kamma*?"

If asked this, we must be sure not to degrade the Buddha by answering carelessly or recklessly. In fact we can never really vitiate the Buddha, but our words may belittle his worth.

The Buddha must have brought about the complete cessation of his *kamma* because he wiped out the mental defilements, which is the meaning of "ending *kamma*". He transcended every kind of *kamma,* and it was this very fact that made him famous, that constituted his glory. The sage Gotama had become a *sabbakammakkhayaṃ-patto,* that is, one who has succeeded in bringing about the cessation of all his *kamma.* The news of this event spread through India until it reached the adherents of other sects and religions. For instance, a certain brahmin called Bavari sent sixteen disciples to the Buddha, to ask him questions and obtain knowledge from him. Others came to test him. Because of the news that the sage Gotama had become a *sabbakammakkhayaṃ-patto,* had achieved the complete cessation of his *kamma,* people in India at that period were full of admiration. They were overjoyed at hearing the words *"sabbakammakkhayaṃ-patto"*. It was for just this reason that people became so interested in the Buddha.

We too ought to follow the example of the Buddha and set about the task of putting an end to *kamma.* ♧

22) “What sort of inner life did the Buddha lead?”

The Buddha once said concerning himself, “The Tathāgata dwells in the Temple of Emptiness *(suññatā-vihāra).”* This “temple” is a spiritual temple, not a physical one. “Temple” *(vihāra)* refers to a spiritual dwelling place, that is, a state of mind. The Temple of Emptiness is an ever-present mental state devoid of any ideas of “self” or “belonging to self”. To dwell in the Temple of Emptiness is to live in full awareness that all things are devoid of selfhood. This is *suññatā,* emptiness, and what is called the Temple of Emptiness. The Buddha dwelt in the Temple of Emptiness, experiencing supreme bliss continuously. This is what the Master said of himself.

23) “Why is it held that all things are empty, that this world, that every world, is an empty world?”

Followers of other religions will ask you these questions: “Why do you say the world is empty when it contains all these things? Isn't there matter? Isn't there mind? Isn't the world just full up with things?”

The point is that it is empty of any self or of anything belonging to a self. There is nothing that can be taken as being a self or belonging to a self. Self cannot be found in anything, not in mind, nor in matter, nor in the various products that arise out of mind and matter. The Buddha said that the assertion that all things are empty refers to nothing other than the awareness that they are empty of selfhood.

24) "Now, why is a mind in this state of awareness described as an empty or free mind (Thai, cit waang)?"

There is a verse in the Texts which says, "That is truly empty which is empty of lust, hatred, and delusion." A mind is empty (unencumbered, disengaged, or free) when it is free of lust, hatred, and delusion.

When, by whatever method or means, a mind has been rendered free of all traces of lust, hatred, and delusion, it can be said to be an empty or free mind *(cit waang).* But we are referring here only to what is done actively. When one is asleep, the mind is also empty! That state is likewise one of true emptiness, but we have not actively produced the state, we have not brought it about intentionally. This is not practising Dhamma; it doesn't belong in that category. But if we have made an effort in some way so that the mind becomes emptied of lust, hatred, and delusion, even if only for a moment, then the mind if said to be free, void, empty. This freedom and emptiness can be increased in degree until it becomes complete — absolute freedom and emptiness. An *arahant* (fully perfected individual) is absolutely free. *Ariyans* at lower stages of development are largely free. An ordinary worldling can be free and empty occasionally.

If at any moment there is freedom from lust, hatred, and delusion, then in that moment there is no idea of self. This is known as empty or free mind *(cit waang).* ♣

25) "What is it when there is total emptiness?"

Total emptiness or freedom is called *"nibbāna"* (Sanskrit, *nirvāna).* The condition of emptiness resulting from the complete and thorough elimination of the self-idea is *nibbāna.* This

can be summarized by saying *"Nibbāna* is supreme emptiness." It is that unique vision that transcends ordinary knowledge. We can transcend the various types of ordinary knowledge through seeing that *"nibbāna* is supreme emptiness."

Nibbāna is supreme emptiness, or supreme emptiness is *nibbāna*. Do remember that the perfection of emptiness is what we refer to as *"nibbāna"*. ♣

26) "What is *nibbāna*?"

If you come across someone who insists on raising this question, answer that *nibbāna* is the immortal-element *(amatadhātu)*. Say it is the element that does not perish. All other elements perish, but this one does not perish, because it is free of lust, hatred, and delusion. When there is freedom from delusion, there is no self-idea, there is no grasping or clinging to selfhood, and thus there is no perishing. Because it is what puts an end to perishing, it has been called the immortal-element. This immortal element is the cessation of the mortal element. ♣

27) "We speak of a person finding satisfaction in *nibbāna*. What ought we to call that satisfaction?"

We Buddhists teach that one ought not to go about liking and disliking, finding satisfaction in this and dissatisfaction in that. So if someone finds satisfaction in *nibbāna,* what are we to call that?

It has been said that satisfaction in *nibbāna* is *Dhamma-rāga* (lust for Dhamma) or *Dhamma-nandi* (delight in, Dhamma). On hearing this, there may be some alarm at the use of a Pali word like

rāga (lust) together with the word "Dhamma". But we must understand that the *rāga* in *Dhamma-rāga* is not the kind that desires visual objects, sounds, odours, tastes, and tactile stimuli; it is not sensual lust. It means satisfaction as intense as that which the ordinary householder finds in sensuality, but in this case the satisfaction is found in emptiness, in immortality, in *nibbāna.*

At the present moment we fear and hate *nibbāna,* and do not want to go near it. As soon as we hear the word we shake our heads. We have never had any desire for Dhamma or for *nibbāna.* Our desires are all directed towards sensuality: colours and shapes, sounds, odours, and tastes. To be fair to ourselves we ought to find as much satisfaction in *nibbāna* as we now find in colours and shapes, sounds, odours, and tastes. Then our practice towards the transcending of suffering will go ahead easily. These words *"Dhamma-rāga"* and *"Dhamma-nandi"* were used by the Buddha in this sense. ♣

28) *Here is a question that definitely should be brought up:*

"Is *nibbāna* attained after death or here is this life?"

Teachers who lecture in the fancy preaching halls only talk about *nibbāna* after death. In the *Tipiṭaka,* however, we don't find this. There are expressions such as *sandiṭṭhika-nibbāna (nibbāna* which a practitioner sees personally) and *diṭṭhadhamma-nibbāna (nibbāna* here and now). We are told that the blissful states of consciousness experienced in the four *rūpa-jhānas* and the four *arūpa-jhānas* (eight degrees of deep concentration) are *sandiṭṭhika-nibbāna* or *diṭṭhadhamma-nibbāna.* But for the present purpose,

we may understand these states to be a foretaste of *nibbāna*. They have the flavour of, but are not identical with, real *nibbāna*. Because these states are not perfect and absolute, they have been called *sandiṭṭhika-nibbāna* or *diṭṭhadhamma-nibbāna*.

Yet there are still better words than these. On one occasion the Buddha described the cessation of lust, hatred, and delusion as *"sandiṭṭhikaṃ. akalikaṃ, ehipassikam opanayikaṃ, paccattaṃ veditabbaṃ vinnūhi",* that is, "directly visible, giving immediate results, inviting all to see, leading inward, and to be individually experienced by the wise". These terms imply a living person who has realized, felt, and tasted *nibbāna,* and who can call his friends to come and see what he has found. This shows clearly that he has not died, and he knows the taste of *nibbāna* in his heart.

There are other expressions as well. *Anupādā-parinibbāna* is something attained while life still remains. *Parinibbāyati* refers to the eradication of suffering and defilements without any need for the extinction or disintegration of the five aggregates (the body-mind complex), that is to say, without one's needing to die physically.

Now this word *"nibbāna"* in ordinary everyday language simply means "coolness, absence of heat, absence of suffering". Thus, I should like you to consider the wisdom of our Thai forefathers who had a saying *"Nibbāna is* in dying before death." You probably have never heard this saying, but it is very common among rural people. They say:

Beauty	is to be found in the dead body.
Goodness	is to be found in relinquishment.
The monk	is to be found, in earnestness.
Nibbāna	is to be found in dying before death.

Are we their descendents, more clever or more foolish than our fore-

fathers? Do ponder over this saying *"Nibbāna* is in dying (to self-hood) before death (of the body)." The body doesn't have to die. But attachment to the self-idea must. This is *nibbāna.* The person who realizes it has obtained supreme bliss, yet continues to live. ♣

29) *Now to give you a clearer and deeper understanding of this subject, we shall consider the question*

"Can the lower animals attain *nibbāna*?"

In one of his discourses, the Buddha uses the words *parinibbāyati* and *parinibbuto* in reference to animals that have been trained until their self-assertiveness has been eliminated. For a dog, an elephant, a horse, or anything whatever that is trained until it is tame and no longer unruly, we can use the word *parinibbuto,* the same word used regarding an *arahant* (one who has eliminated the defilements completely). These two words are applicable to one who has put out the fires completely, a person who is completely cooled down. In the Pali language as spoken at the time of the Buddha, the word *"parinibbāna"* could be used in this way, also. When applied to a human being, it meant the achieving of the extinction of defilements, or arahantship (spiritual perfection). When applied to a lower animal, it meant attaining the extinction of self-assertiveness. Applied to a fire, it referred to the going out and becoming cool of the embers. In speaking of boiled or steamed rice which had been served into a bowl and had become cool, the word used was *parinibbāna.* It was an ordinary word, used in a general way for everyday worldly things, to indicate something become cool, something rendered harmless.

So we ought to take good advantage of *nibbāna* and not remain worse off than the beasts to which words like these also can be applied. Don't put it off until death comes. That is the height of stupidity, wasting the Buddha's invaluable gift. Let us study afresh the terms *"nibbāna"* and *"parinibbāna"* with its derivative *"parinibbuto".* Then there will arise the courage and ardour for the job of penetrating to and attaining that which is called *"nibbāna".* Let us not shrink back like those people who on hearing the word *"nibbāna"* become drowsy, apprehensive, or just bored.

I ask all of you to interest yourselves in the word *"nibbāna".* The getting rid of harmful influences, even the passing of one's youth, may be called a sort of *nibbāna.* Just as with animals which have been trained until their dangerous self-assertiveness has been eliminated, these are *parinibbuto,* that is, coolness, complete coolness. So let us be completely cool people who have nothing that can set fire to us and burn us. Let us not thoughtlessly produce heat, but rather win the prize that is *nibbāna.* To begin with the kind known as *sandiṭṭhika-nibbāna* or *diṭṭhadhamma-nibbāna,* then by degrees we can work up to the level of real *nibbāna.* ♣

30) *Now,*
"What is the highest good for humanity?"

THE ENLIGHTENED ONE once said, "All Buddhas say *nibbāna* is the supreme thing." Supreme thing means "the ultimate and highest good for humanity." In the international language of ethics, it is known by the Latin term *summum bonum,* the utmost goodness, the best and highest thing attainable by a human being in this very life. Buddhist students agree that if there is a *summum bonum*

in Buddhism, then it must be *nibbāna* itself. So if a foreigner asks what the *summum bonum* of Buddhism is, you should answer "All Buddhas say *nibbāna* is the supreme thing." ♣

31) *Next question,*

"Are there any *arahants* in the world at the present time?"

This point can be answered by quoting the Buddha, "If all *bhikkhus* live rightly, the world will not be empty of *arahants* (worthy, undefiled beings)." He said this on the very day he died.

If doubts or questions arise as to whether there are any *arahants* nowadays, don't go answering simply "Yes" or "No". This would be a serious mistake. You must answer by quoting the Buddha, "If *bhikkhus* live rightly, the world will not be empty of *arahants."* ♣

32) *This leaves us with the question,*

"What is meant by living rightly?"

"Right living" really has a special meaning of its own. To live rightly is simply to maintain conditions such that the mental defilements cannot obtain nourishment and cannot develop. Hence, it is nothing other than living all the time with a mind that is free and empty *(cit waang),* that is, a mind that views the entire world as something empty and does not clutch or grab at anything as being a self or belonging to a self. Then, though one will continue to speak, think, and act; to seek, use, and consume things; one will not have the idea of grasping at any one of them as being a

self. Just acting with constant awareness, acting wisely, acting with insight into the circumstances in which one is involved — that is what is known as "living rightly". In other words, living rightly is living in such a way that the defilements have no means of arising and no means of obtaining nourishment.

We could also say it amounts to keeping to the Noble Eightfold Path. This is right living because right understanding, the first aspect of the Noble Path, is simply the knowledge, the understanding, the unobscured and perfect insight, that there is nothing that should be grasped at or clung to. Thus, in striving, in speaking, in any activity whatsoever, there is simply no grasping or clinging.

If we live rightly as described, the defilements become undernourished and emaciated. They fall away of their own accord and become completely extinct. There is no way they can arise again, because one has given up the habit of letting them arise. This is important because the things called *anusaya* (unwholesome tendencies), which build up within us, are only a matter of familiarity with defilement. However, one who doesn't know this looks upon the defilements as permanent entities or selves, and thus falls into the wrong view of eternalism *(sassata-diṭṭhi).* To hold that the defilements are permanent entities lying deep within the character is to be an eternalist, one who clings to belief in an eternal self or soul. Those who have insight and understanding based on Buddhist principles cannot regard these things as independent and permanent entities or selves. There is a reason for their existence; they arise in conformity with causal laws. When they arise too frequently, one becomes used to them and regards them as permanent aspects of one's nature. Believing them to be permanent misleads us to think they are lying in wait deep within us all the time.

Do understand that the *anusaya* are only our habitual tenden-

cies, the results of a process of familiarization. This is how the word *"anusaya"* is used. ♣

33) *The next question asks,* "Is it difficult or easy to be an *arahant*?"

Almost everyone answers that it is extremely difficult. No one dares to think or speak of it as being easy. Here again, let us keep to the principle of not giving unqualified answers. Anyone who gives unqualified answers, saying, for example, "there is" or "there is not", "it is easy" or "it is difficult", is not a follower of the Buddha.

The Buddha's principle is that of causality. If we act rightly through understanding the principle of causality, being an *arahant* is easy. If we go against the principle of causality, it is extremely difficult. Only because we are accustomed to the defilements does it appear difficult to become an *arahant.* Here we ought to bear in mind that saying of the Buddha, "If we live rightly, the world will not be empty of *arahants."* This living rightly is not difficult, it is not beyond our capacity. Blockade the defilements to prevent their obtaining nourishment. If we want to kill a tiger, we could pen him in with nothing to eat, and he would die of his own accord. It would not be necessary for us to go in, confront the tiger, and let him bite and claw us. This is what is meant by saying it is not beyond our capacity. This is the technique, and it lies within our abilities.

Therefore, being an *arahant* will be easy or not depending on whether we use the right or the wrong methods. If we follow what the Buddha said, it is not difficult. "Live rightly and the world will not be empty of *arahants."* ♣

34) *Here is another question:*

"Would we be able to recognize an arahant if we met one?"

PEOPLE LIKE ASKING this very much. For instance there are some who doubt if we could recognize an *arahant* now living in the world. If asked whether we could recognize an *arahant* if one came walking along, we should consider the following. In the event that we didn't recognize this one and never could recognize any of the them, then even *arahants* themselves would not be able to recognize one another as such.

It is said that the Elder Sariputta did not know that Lakuṇṭakabhaddiya was an *arahant,* also. He carried on expounding Dhamma to him, the purpose of which was to make possible the attainment of arahantship. This shows that Sariputta did not know that Lakuṇṭakabhaddiya was an *arahant.* However, if it was always the case that we did recognize an *arahant* as such, then even a god in the Brahma world who was himself no *arahant* would be able to recognize which people were arahants. He could prophesy who would die having attained *nibbāna* and who would die without having attained *nibbāna.*

Thus, if asked whether we should be able to recognize an *arahant* or not, we must say that we might be able to or not, depending on the circumstances. Even *arahants* themselves might not recognize one another as such. So we ought not to give an unqualified answer, saying that we could recognize one or that we could not, as do the teachers in temple preaching halls, who like being dogmatic about such things.

35) *Now the next question is:* "Where could we meet an *arahant*?"

We must look for an *arahant* in the extinction of the mental defilements. Don't go busily searching for one in the forest, in a monastery, in a cave, on a mountain, in a village, in a city, or in a meditation centre. You can go looking for an *arahant* in the extinction of the defilements. Carry out whatever tests or investigations or experiments will prove to you the extinction of the defilements. If this is not possible, then there is no need to search, no need to seek. You will know for yourself, that's all.

Where there is extinction of the defilements, there is the *arahant*. ♣

36) "Lay people cannot be *arahants*, can they?"

Don't go giving an unqualified answer to this question either, saying they can or cannot. It must be answered by saying that an *arahant* has transcended laity and monkhood alike. Please note that the belief that one who becomes an *arahant* must hurry off and be ordained within seven days or else die was made by overconfident, assertive teachers of later ages, and appears only in commentaries, sub-commentaries, and other such post-canonical works. An *arahant* must always transcend laity and monkhood. No one can make an *arahant* into a lay person (i.e. a worldly person), but he lives above and beyond the state of monkhood too.

Therefore, don't go making statements as to whether an *arahant* can live at home or not. Even though they might take an *arahant* and force him to live at home, they could never make him into a householder. He has transcended both laity and monkhood. ♣

37) *Now another question:*

"How is it that a 'man-killer' could be an *arahant*?"

This can be very easily answered. That which is called "the person" (or "the individual") has to be killed before one can be an *arahant.* If what we call "the person" has not been killed, there is no way one can be an *arahant.* One has first to kill the idea of "the person", of "self", of "I" and "he" or "she", of "animal" and "being". That is, there must cease to be any attachment to the ideas that this is an animal, this is a person, this is an abiding entity, this is a self. To do this is to kill the person or to kill off the thing we refer to as "the person". Doing this, one simultaneously becomes an *arahant.* Hence it is said that one has to kill off the person before one can be an *arahant.* The Buddha sometimes used stronger words than these. He said on several occasions that the parents must be killed before one can be an *arahant.* The parents are the mental defilements such as ignorance, craving, and clinging, or any karmic activities that function as parents or propagators coming together to give birth to the "I", to the idea of "the person". So one has to kill them off; one has to kill the parents of that person so that one can be an *arahant.*

Then there is the story of Angulimala, a notorious killer. Angulimala became an *arahant* when he killed off the person. When he heard the word "stop" from the Buddha, he understood it in its right sense. Some people, through misunderstanding, try to explain that the Buddha, in saying that he had stopped, meant that he had stopped killing people as Angulimala was still doing when they met. That is, they explain that the Buddha had stopped, whereas Angulimala had not but was still going about killing people. This is not the right explanation. When the Buddha said "I have stopped," he

meant "I have stopped being 'the person', have completely ceased being 'the person'." Angulimala understood it rightly as completely ceasing to be the person, with the result that he too was able to kill off the person, to kill the idea of being this individual. Thus Angulimala became an *arahant* like the Buddha.

Even the simple word "stop" in this story has been completely misunderstood by most people. It has been wrongly understood, wrongly explained, wrongly discussed, and wrongly taught, so that the account becomes self-contradictory. To say that one could become an *arahant* by merely ceasing to kill people is ridiculous.

So one has to stop being the person and kill the firm belief in individuals, selves, "I", and "they", before one can be an *arahant.* In other words, to become an *arahant,* kill "the person". ♣

38) *Now we shall examine a minor point to help give us a better understanding of the foregoing questions and answers. I shall put the question,* "What is the world full of?"

Some people with a certain outlook answer, "This world is full of suffering *(dukkha)."* For instance they say that there is nothing that arises, persists, and passes away but it is a source of suffering. This is correct, but it is hard to understand.

The question should be answered as the Buddha answered it. "This world is full of empty things. This world is empty. There is nothing that is a "self" or that belongs to a 'self'."

Don't be satisfied with saying simply "In the world there is only suffering, there is nothing that is not a source of suffering." This is certainly a correct statement, but it is ambiguous and liable to be

misinterpreted; for those same things, if one doesn't go grasping and clinging at them, are not a source of suffering at all. Let this be well understood. Neither the world nor any of the things that comprise the world is or ever has been in itself, a source of suffering. The moment one goes grasping and clinging, there is suffering; if one does not grasp and cling, there is no suffering. To say that life is suffering is shallow, oversimplified, and premature. Life grasped at and clung to is suffering; life not grasped at or clung to is not suffering.

This life has purpose, it is not pointless. Some people like to say that life has no purpose because they do not know how to give it purpose. If we known how to use this life as an instrument for finding out about the world, about the causes of the world's arising, about the complete cessation of the world, and about the way of practice leading to the complete cessation of the world, then this life does have purpose. Life, then, is a means of studying, practising, and obtaining the fruits of practice. It is a means of coming to know the best thing that human beings can and ought to know, namely, *nibbāna.* So remember, this life does have purpose, although for the fool who doesn't know how to use it, it has no purpose at all.

What is the world full of? Look at it from one point of view and you say, "It is full of suffering," or simply, "It is suffering." But look at it from a higher point of view and you can say that it is nothing but an endless process of arising, persisting, ceasing, arising, persisting, ceasing. If we grasp at and cling to it, suffering will be produced. If we do not grasp at and cling to it, then it simply continues arising, persisting, and ceasing. So we must bear in mind that a person who has become free, who has become an *arahant,* does not regard these things as a source of suffering, nor of happiness either. The *arahant's* unsoiled *pañcakkhandha* (five aggregates or body-mind complex) cannot be said to be involved in suffer-

ing. There is only the causally conditioned flowing, changing, and revolving of the five aggregates.

What is the world full of? It is full of things that arise, persist, and cease. Grasp and cling to them, and they produce suffering *(dukkha).* Don't grasp and cling to them, and they do not produce suffering. ♣

39) *People have asked,* "What sort of merit has little effect and what sort great effect?"

The Buddha taught, "The value of merit-making which is based on greed has not the sixteenth sixteenth part of the value of cultivating friendliness *(mettā).*"

Merit-making based on greed includes merit-making for publicity, merit-making in exchange for paradise or heaven, merit-making in order to be reborn beautiful or rich, and merit-making to gain sensual pleasure. Such merit-making is based on greed. It is solely grasping and clinging. Merit-making that consists of grasping and clinging is still merit-making, but it cannot have the sixteenth sixteenth part of the value of practising *metta.* Friendliness is not based on self-interest; it is practised for the sake of other people. There is universal love for all other people. Merit born of *mettā* is great merit; merit based on greed does not amount to the sixteenth sixteenth part of that of *metta.*

In the Pali language, when it was desired to indicate a great quantitative difference between things, this sort of expression was commonly used, "the sixteenth part taken sixteen times". Suppose we have one unit of something. Divide it up into sixteen parts and take one of these. Again, divide that part into six-

teen parts and take one of them. Then divide that part yet again into sixteen parts. Again take one and divide it. Carry on like this a total of sixteen times to get the sixteeth sixteenth part.

Merit which is based on greed is described as not worth the sixteenth sixteenth part of the merit based on friendliness *(mettā).* ♣

40) *Now,*

"Where is great merit to be found?"

The Buddha once said, "Developing awareness-of-impermanence *(aniccasañña)* for only as long as it takes to click the fingers has more effect and merit value than providing meals for the entire Sangha when led by the Buddha."

This means that if we could invite the whole Buddhist Sangha together with the Buddha at its head and offer them food, we would still not gain as much merit as by successfully developing awareness-of-impermanence for the duration of a click of the fingers. This is a most fundamental point.

So, be wary of great deeds of charity such as some people display in temple halls, because they are concerned with sensual pleasures. Great merit, to be genuine, must be as the Buddha described. Developing awareness-of-impermanence for just a brief moment is far better than all this sort of providing for *bhikkhus.* ♣

41) *Now consider the "happy state"*

"Where is the happy state to be found? Where do we go to get happiness?"

In the texts, there is a passage which speaks of celestial beings *(devatas)* dying, passing away, coming to the end of their merit, and

coming to the end of their life spans. It also tells of their wishing to attain the happy state, seeking it, and wishing to know where to find it. In the end they come to the conclusion that the happy state is to be found in the realm of human beings. The celestial. beings rejoice saying, "May your wishes be fulfilled! Go to the happy state in the human realm!" The expression "happy state in the human realm" signifies that in the human realm impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood can more readily be perceived than in the celestial realm. In the human realm there are enlightened beings, there are *arahants,* and there are the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. In the celestial realm, that jungle of sensuality, there are none of these things. Thus, celestial beings come to the human realm in search of the happy state. It is ridiculous that human beings here should want to go to the celestial realm for happiness. Yet some people seek paradise, happiness in the next existence, in the realm of celestial beings. They invest in it by making merit, giving to charity, selling their houses and goods, and building things in monasteries. Where is the genuinely happy state to be found? Think it over. ♣

42) *Next, concerning what are called* **iddhis** *(psychic powers) the question is,*

"How far should we take interest in these things called *iddhis*?"

First of all, we shall say something about the *iddhis* themselves. The word *iddhi* means "power". It was originally an everyday word, a household term applied to things with the ability to pro-

mote success in perfectly normal ways. Anything with the ability to promote success was called an *iddhi.* The meaning was then extended to cover success in marvellous, miraculous ways, until we come across the sort of *iddhis* that are exclusively mental phenomena. Because they are mental, they have productive and beneficial properties that render them far more marvellous and wide-ranging than anything physical. They are like our labour-saving devices. Nowadays we have tractors that can build roads and so on. These too would have been called *iddhis.* But these are physical marvels. The *iddhis* we are concerned with here have to do with the mind; they are mental, not physical.

An exponent of *iddhis* (psychic powers) has trained his mind to such a degree that he can cause other people to experience whatever sensations he wishes to have them feel. He can cause others to see things with their own eyes just as he wishes them to see, to hear clearly and distinctly such sounds as he wishes them to hear, to smell just as he wishes them to smell, to experience taste sensations as if really experiencing them with the tongue, and to feel as if through the skin softness, hardness, and other such tactile stimuli. The process can then be extended until the demonstrator is able to cause the other person to experience fear, love or any mental state without realizing why. The *iddhis* are thus extremely useful and quite wonderful.

But this kind of mental phenomenon does not produce physical things. The psychic powers are incapable of creating real physical things of any practical value. They alone can't create *bhikkhu's* huts, temples, rice, fish, or food, so that one might live without any problems. This sort of thing can't happen. The objects appear to exist or are experienced as existing in eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind for only as long as the *iddhi* is being demonstrated. There-

after they disappear. So the *iddhis* are not capable of building a hut or a temple by themselves. There definitely has to be a lay supporter to build and offer it. For instance, Jetavana and Veluvana had to be built and offered to the Buddha. And several times the Buddha went without food because of famine and had to eat rice set out as horse feed, and only a handful of it a day.

This serves to remind us that the physical and mental are two distinct and different realms. It is possible to demonstrate *iddhis* of both types. The Buddha did not deny mental *iddhis,* but he strongly disapproved of demonstrating them because they are mere illusions. He therefore prohibited the demonstration of them by *bhikkhus,* and he himself refrained from it. We don't come across it in the *Tipiṭaka* that the Buddha demonstrated *iddhis.* There do exist accounts of the Buddha demonstrating *iddhis,* but they occur only in commentaries and other works. Consequently, the truth of these accounts is dubious — though really there is no need for us to judge them true or false.

The Buddha once said, "The various *iddhis* that are demonstrated — flying through the air, becoming invisible, clairaudience, clairvoyance and the like — are *sāsavā* and *upadhikā," Sāsavā* means "associated with *āsavas"* (the "cankers" of attachment to sensual pleasure, attachment to becoming, attachment to false views, and attachment to ignorance). In other words, *iddhis* performed with grasping and clinging, or motivated by grasping and clinging, are called *sāsavā.* The performance of *upadhikā iddhis* is motivated by *upadhi. Upadhi* means "grasping and clinging". They are likewise *iddhis* motivated by attachment. They are demonstrated by a mind that grasps and clings. *Iddhis* of this sort are *sāsavā* and *upadhikā.*

Now let us turn our attention to the opposite kind of *iddhi*

— *anāsavā* and *anuppdhikā* — namely the ability to control one's own mind at will. We shall take as a particular example the subject of unpleasantness. Here one causes oneself to see an unpleasant thing as unpleasant, to see a pleasant thing as unpleasant, to see everything as unpleasant to see everything as pleasant, then to see everything as neither of these, as neither pleasant nor unpleasant. This is one example demonstrating the ability to control the mind so completely that constant mindfulness and equanimity can be maintained in the presence of sense objects — shapes and colours, flavours, odours, sounds, and tactile objects — which influence the mind. The possession of mindfulness, constant awareness, and equanimity is an *iddhi.* It is an *iddhi of* the type called *anāsavā* (free of *āsava)* and *anuppadhikā* (free of *upadhi,* not defiled, not grasping, and not a basis for grasping). These are the things called the *iddhis,* and this is how we ought to view them.

The real *iddhis* that are demonstrated in order to cause the arising of psychic miracles, the *sāsavā* and *upadhikā* types, are still difficult to perform. To master them involves much practice, which is organized into a great system. It can be done, genuinely achieved and demonstrated, by only a very few people. But there is a spurious variety too, based on pure deception, sheer trickery, sometimes involving the use of incantations. These are not the real things at all.

There are people who can demonstrate what are apparently genuine *iddhis,* but to acquire those skills is very difficult and requires arduous training. By contrast, the *anāsavā* and *anupadhikā iddhis* lie within the capabilities of most people. This sort is worth thinking about. As it is, we are interested in the sort of *iddhis* we can't perform but aren't interested in the most beneficial ones (which

we can produce). These things called *iddhis* certainly have a great attraction for us, but our thinking on the subject needs to be completely revised. ♣

43) *Now we can discuss the question,* "Where do happiness and suffering originate?" or at least, "Where does suffering originate?"

It is generally said that happiness and suffering arise from previous *kamma.* This is the least correct answer. Suffering is something that arises from causes and conditions, and these causes and conditions are of several sorts, kinds, and varieties. Ignorance is a cause, craving is a cause, attachment is a cause, **and** *kamma* is a cause too. Now in saying that suffering comes from *kamma,* we ought to have in mind new *kamma, kamma* in the present life, that is to say, the brand-new ignorance, craving, and attachment of this life. Think of these as the factors responsible for suffering, the roots causing the arising of suffering. We must realize that old *kamma* is unable to stand up to new *kamma,* because we have the power to produce new *kamma.* New *kamma,* the third type of *kamma,* is capable of abolishing old *kamma* completely (see No. 14). Old *kamma* consists of just good *kamma* and bad *kamma.* There is no other sort of old *kamma.* New *kamma,* however, can be any one of three lands, the third kind being simply the Noble Eightfold Path. When we cause it to arise, it suppresses the first and second types of *kamma.* If we live the Path thoroughly, that is, put a complete end to the defilements, the new *kamma* (the Noble Path) completely overwhelms the old *kamma,* both good and bad. That is to say, old *kamma* (the

first and second types only) cannot stand up to new *kamma* (the third type).

So we ought to take an interest in this thing called the Noble Path. I spoke before about what it is like if we practise the ordinary old way, and what it is like if we practise the short cut method (see No. 13). The practice of the short cut method consists in direct self-examination with a view to destroying grasping at the ideas of "self" and "belonging to self". That new *kamma* will be of the third type, the most powerful *kamma*. Once arisen it will be razor-sharp and capable of destroying a great quantity of longstanding old *kamma*. Suffering arises from new *kamma*, from today's ignorance, craving, and attachment. These arise through our having seen shapes and colours, heard sounds, smelt odours, and tasted flavours just yesterday and the day before. They can be wiped out by new *kamma* which we have to produce too. Don't be deceived into thinking it is all due to previous *kamma*. Previous *kamma* can be traced back to a series of causes which can be wiped out! So don't ignore new *kamma* of this third type. It is capable of annihilating old *kamma* absolutely and completely. ♣

44) *This subject brings us to the question,* "Where can we put an end to suffering (*dukkha*)?"

We don't put an end to suffering in the monastery, in the forest, in the home, or on the mountain. We have to put an end to suffering right at the cause of suffering itself. What we must do is investigate and find out the way suffering arises in us each day and from what root it originates. Then we have to cut off that par-

ticular root. Yesterday's suffering has already been and gone. It can't come back, it is over and done with. It is suffering that arises today, right now, that is the problem. Suffering that may arise tomorrow is not as yet a problem, but the suffering arising and existing right now must be eradicated. So then, where is it to be eradicated? It must be eradicated at its root. We must study life until we realize that, as the Buddha said, suffering arises simply from grasping and clinging.

It is usually proclaimed eloquently, but ambiguously, that birth, aging, and death are suffering. But birth is not suffering, aging is not suffering, death is not suffering where there is no attachment to "my birth", "my aging", "my death" At the moment, we are grasping at birth, aging, pain, and death as "ours". If we don't grasp, they are not suffering, they are only bodily changes. The body changes thus, and we call it "birth"; the body changes thus, and we call it "aging"; the body changes thus, and we call it "death"; but we fail to see it as just bodily changes. We see it as actual birth, and what is more, we call it "my birth", "my aging", and "my death". This is a multiple delusion because "I" is a delusion to start with; so seeing a bodily change as "my birth", or "my aging" is yet a further delusion. We fail to see that these are simply bodily changes. Now just as soon as we do see these as only bodily changes, birth, aging, and death disappear, and "I" disappears at the same time. There is no longer any "I", and this condition is not suffering.

The Buddha said, "Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, death is suffering", and the majority of people, almost all in fact, misunderstand him. They point to the condition of birth, the condition of aging, and the condition of death as being suffering. Some can't explain it at all. Some, hesitant and uncertain, explain it vaguely and

ambiguously, evasively hemming and hawing. This is because they forget that the Buddha said *"Saṅkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkhā"* (the five aggregates, when clung to, are suffering). The aggregates are body and mind; together they constitute the person. If there is grasping at anything as being "I" or "mine", then the five aggregates are suffering. Those five aggregates are a heavy burden, a source of suffering. There is fire and brimstone in those five aggregates. So the five aggregates, if associated with grasping and clinging, are suffering.

Now suppose these five aggregates are in the condition known as "aging". If the mind does not grasp at and cling to them as "aging", or as "my aging", then they will not be suffering. We shall then see the body as empty, the feelings as empty, the perceptions as empty, the willed activities as empty, and consciousness as empty. We shall see the whole flowing and swirling conditioning of everything as empty. Without clinging it cannot be suffering. Such are pure *pañcakkhandha* (aggregates dissociated from grasping). Such are the five aggregates of an *arahant,* or what we presume to call the five aggregates of an *arahant.* For really, an *arahant* cannot be described as being the owner of the five aggregates, but we look on those aggregates as being the receptacle of the virtues of arahantship. That type of mind cannot grasp at the aggregates in any way as being "mine", still we presume to call them the pure *pañcakkhandha* of an *arahant.*

Where to put an end to suffering? We have to eliminate suffering at the root of suffering, namely grasping and clinging to things. Suffering due to attachment to wealth must be eradicated there in that attachment. Suffering due to grasping and clinging to the illusions of power, prestige, honour, and fame must be eradicated there in that grasping and clinging. Then wealth, power, and prestige

will not be in themselves suffering. So find out where it arises and eliminate it there. In the words if the old-time Dhamma experts, "whichever way it goes up, bring it down that same way." ♣

45) *Now I wish to discuss a question concerning what we may call "really knowing":*

"To really know something, how much do we have to know?"

I ADVISE AND BEG you to listen particularly to the words of the Buddha that I am about to quote. The Buddha said that to really know any object, we must know five things about it, namely: (1) What are the characteristics or properties of the object? (2) From what does the object arise? (3) What is its *assāda,* its enticing quality, its appeal, its allurement? (4) What is the *ādīnava,* the hidden danger, the sinister power to harm that lies concealed in it? (5) What is the *nissaraṇa,* the trick by means of which we can get the better of it? What is the device, the skillful means of escaping from the grip of this object?

So, to really know something we must answer these questions:

First: What are its properties?

Second: What is its origin, its birthplace?

Third: What is its *assāda,* its attraction?

Fourth: What is its *ādīnava,* its harmful property, its danger?

Fifth: What is the *nissaraṇa,* the means of escape from the power of the object?

There are five questions altogether. If you study any object from these five points of view, you will get the better of that object. At the present time, you may be studying on the graduate level or post-graduate level. But if we are not studying from these five points of view, then we are mastered by objects, that is to say, by the world. If we study the world in terms of these five aspects, there is no way we shall be mastered by the world. So let us be careful about studying the world. Why are we studying? For what ultimate purpose are we studying? If we are studying so as to build peace in the world, then let us be very careful. Our studies will bring no beneficial results at all if not based on this Buddhist principle.

You have probably never heard of these things called the *assāda, ādīnava,* and *nissaraṇa,* yet the *Tipiṭaka* is full of them. These three *words — assāda, ādīnava,* and *nissaraṇa,* hardly ever present themselves to our eyes or ears, but please remember that they appear frequently in the *Tipiṭaka.* When the Buddha wished to impart a real knowledge of anything, he taught along these lines. Sometimes he cut it short, considering only the last three points. What is the nature of the object's *assāda* (its allurement)? What is the nature of its *ādīnava* (its harmful properties)? Every object has both attractive and harmful qualities. What is the nature of the *nissaraṇa* (the cunning manoeuvre by means of which we can get the better of it)?

There is, so to speak, a hook hidden in that bait hanging there. The *assāda* is the juicy bait enticing the fish to bite. The concealed hook is the *ādīnava,* that is, the dangerous, cruel power to harm which lies hidden inside the bait. And the *nissaraṇa* is the technique for outwitting the hook and bait. The fish must have a technique for eating the bait without becoming hooked. The thing called the bait then no longer functions as bait, but becomes

instead a good piece of food, which the fish can happily swallow without getting hooked.

Therefore, we ought always to look at the world in terms these five aspects. One aspect of the world, the *assāda,* the bait, lures us until we become so deeply engrossed in it that we turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to all else. But there is a hook inside it. People who get hooked up on the world cannot break free; they have to drown in the world, that is, in suffering. Now, the *ariyans* (individuals well advanced in practice) look and see that the *assāda,* the *ādīnava,* and the *nissaraṇa* are such and such. They are thus able to live in the world, swallowing the bait of the world without becoming caught on the hook. They know every object well enough to be fully aware of these five things. Its properties, its *samudaya* (root cause), it *assāda* (bait), its *ādīnava* (hook), and the *nissaraṇa* (strategem). To know any object we have to learn about and come to know all these five factors, or at a minimum the last three.

No matter what things we come into contact with in the course of our studies and other activities, we ought to apply this principle to them all. Then we shall know how to discriminate, and shall be able to reap the greatest reward without being hurt. This is called "really knowing". By acting on this knowledge, it will be an easy task to practise Dhamma and leave behind the defilements. Viewing the world in terms of these five aspects, we shall see it as filled up with *assāda* or attractive allurement on the outside and *ādīnava* or danger on the inside. We shall know the world as a swindle, a counterfeit, a deception, an illusion, and shall not become hooked upon it, not become infatuated with it. A mind that always operates with insight will view colours and shapes, flavours, odours, sounds, tactile objects, and mental images rightly in terms of these five aspects. It will not be overpowered by them and there will not develop crav-

ing and attachment to the idea of selfhood. Freedom will become its normal day-to-day condition. Ultimately it is not beyong our power to practise Dhamma and make progress towards *nibbāna.* ♣

46) *Now I shall put the following question:*

"What is it to attain the Stream of *Nibbāna*?"

THINK BACK TO the word *"nibbāna"* in the sense already discussed, that is, as the highest good attainable by humanity (see No. 30). If, in any one lifetime, one does not come to know the state called *nibbāna,* or fails even to taste the flavour of *nibbāna,* that life has been wasted.

"Stream of *Nibbāna" refers* to a course that has reached the stage that ensures a flowing and tending only towards *nibbāna.* It flows towards the extinction of suffering, with no backflow in the direction of suffering and the Woeful States. We call this course "The Stream".

One who has attained the Stream is a *sotapanna* (Stream-enterer). *A sotapanna* has not yet attained complete *nibbāna.* The Stream-enterer attains *diṭṭhadhamma-nibbāna* (see No. 28), or *tadanga-nibbāna* (coincidental *nibbāna),* or whatever sort of *nibbāna* is appropriate in one's case. But having attained the real Stream of *Nibbāna,* one will never again become attached to the *assāda* and *ādīnava* (bait and hook) of the world. The world never again will be able to deceive one. This doesn't mean, for instance, that one gives up all connection with the world, or even all indulgence in sensuality. It means simply that one's mind has begun to view these things as unworthy of grasping and clinging. It is practically certain that it will not grasp and cling, though it may still do so in occasional moments of unawareness.

To be a *sotapanna,* one must give up three of the "fetters" *(sañyojana),* namely belief in a permanent ego-entity *(sakkāya-diṭṭhi),* doubt *(vicikicchā),* and superstition *(sīlabbata-parāmāsa).* To give up ego-belief is to give up one kind of delusion, to give up doubt is to give up another kind of delusion, and to give up superstition is to give up a third kind of delusion. He has not yet given up sensual desire *(kāma-rāga),* the fourth fetter. *A sakidāgāmī* ("Once-returner", one stage more advanced than the *sotapanna)* has not altogether given it up either. This means that though one may not be able to give up sensual desire, still one does not fall right into the pit of sensuality. Though one may make contact with or indulge in sensuality, one will do so mindfully, as an *ariyan.* But don't forget that one has given up ego-belief, doubt, and superstition. This is the criterion for one's having attained to the Stream of *Nibbāna* and being certain to carry on toward *nibbāna* itself.

So it is a matter of giving up misunderstanding. One must give up misunderstanding before giving up sensual desire *(kāma-rāga).* Sensual desire is not as yet a dangerous and terrifying problem or enemy. What is terrifying is delusion. In the texts there is a saying that the most putrid thing of all is a mind clinging to self, to ego. The Buddha did not point to sensuality as the most foul-smelling thing; he pointed to delusion. We generally tend to overestimate and overvalue the extent of a *sotapanna's* giving up of involvement in sensuality. When its standard is thus misconceived, the whole picture becomes distorted and there is no way things can be brought into agreement. So it is essential that we know what it is to attain the first stage, the Stream of *Nibbāna.* Not sensual desire but ignorance is what must be given up first.

Ego-belief *(sakkāya-diṭṭhi)* consists in self-centredness. Self-

centredness, as it normally occurs every day, comes from failure to perceive *suññatā* (emptiness) even in a crude way. The mind is confused and not free; consequently there is ego-belief. So to be a *sotapanna* one must give up ego-belief for good and all. In the normal course of events it arises and ceases, arises and ceases. Every day ego-belief is present many times, over and over. But there are also times when it is not present. We have to study what it is like to have ego-belief and what it is like to be free of ego-belief. When there is self-centredness, that is *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*.

Now *vicikicchā* is doubt or hesitancy as to what may be taken as certain, hesitancy as to whether or not to believe the Buddha, and hesitancy as to whether or not to practise for the absolute and complete extincition of suffering on the supramundane level. Because there is this hesitancy, one is not sufficiently interested in Dhamma. It is hard to be interested in Dhamma even for five minutes a day. Yet one is interested in such things as fun and laughter, food and drink, study and learning, business and work, for hours and hours a day. If the time spent on fun and laughter were devoted instead to developing an interest in Dhamma, one would come to understand it quickly. The most important kind of hesitancy is hesitancy about whether or not it would be a good thing to adopt the Buddha's means of extinguishing suffering. Indecision about setting out on the Path to the extinction of suffering constitutes a great problem and a great danger. Most people consider the prospect lacking in flavour, unpleasant, unagreeable, and devoid of attraction, because they are infatuated by the allurements of the world. So hesitancy must be eradicated. We are subject to suffering; we must be resolute about putting an end to suffering.

The third fetter is *sīlabbata-parāmāsa* (chronic superstition). Have a look at yourself and see what sort of chronically superstitious

behaviour is to be found in you. You have been taught to fear harmless little lizards and similar animals until it has become a habit. This is superstition. It is primitive and childlike. You have been brought up to believe in sacred trees, sacred mountains, sacred temples, sacred spirit houses: all this too is superstition. To sum up, *sīlabbata-parāmāsa* is superstition with regard to things one does oneself. Taking certain things which should be used in a particular way and using them in a different way — for instance, letting charitable deeds reinforce selfishness when they should be used to eliminate it — this is superstition. So there are charitable deeds which are superstition, and there is rigorous adherence to moral precepts by both *bhikkhus* and lay people which is superstition. Chronically superstitious and false understanding with respect to anything at all is covered by the term *sīlabbata-parāmāsa.*

Please bear with me while I give just one more example of the third fetter: the four Woeful States, which are depicted on the walls of temples — hell, the realm of beasts, the realm of hungry ghosts *(petas),* and the realm of cowardly demons *(asuras).* These are known as the Four Woeful States. We are taught to believe that on dying we may descend into the Woeful States. We are never taught that we fall into woeful states every day. Such woeful states are more real and more important than those on temple walls. Don't fall at all! If you don't fall into these woeful states now, you will be sure not to fall into any woeful states after death. This is never taught, so people never get to the essence and real meaning of the words "Four Woeful States". The Buddha was not a materialist. He did not take the body as his reference standard as does the story of the hell where one is boiled and fried in a copper pan. The Buddha took mind as his reference standard. ♣

47) *Now, let us see,*
"What is the meaning of the Four Woeful States?"

The first of the Four Woeful States is hell. Hell is anxiety (in Thai, literally "a hot heart"). Whenever one experiences anxiety, burning, and scorching, one is simultaneously reborn as a creature of hell. It is a spontaneous rebirth, a mental rebirth. Although the body physically inhabits the human realm, as soon as anxiety arises the mind falls into hell. Anxiety about possible loss of prestige and fame, anxiety of any sort — that is hell.

Now rebirth in the realm of beasts is stupidity. Whenever one is inexcusably stupid about something: stupid in not knowing that Dhamma and *nibbāna* are desirable, stupid in not daring to come into contact with or get close to Buddhism, stupid in believing that if one became interested in Dhamma or Buddhism it would make one old-fashioned and odd. That is how children see it, and their parents too. They try to pull back and move far away from Dhamma and religion. This is stupidity. Regardless of what sort of stupidity it is, it amounts to rebirth as an animal. As soon as stupidity arises and overwhelms one, one becomes an animal. One is a beast by spontaneous rebirth, by mental rebirth. This is the second Woeful State.

The third Woeful State is the condition of a *peta,* a ghost that is chronically hungry because his desires continually outrun the supply of goods. It is a chronic mental hunger which a person suffers from, not hunger for bodily food. For instance, one wants to get a thousand *baht.* Then having just got the thousand *baht,* one suddenly wants to get ten thousand *baht.* Having just got the ten thousand *baht,* one suddenly wants to get a hundred thousand *baht.* No sooner has one got the hundred thousand *baht,* it's a mil-

lion *baht* that one wants, or a hundred million. It is a case of chasing and never catching. One has all the symptoms of chronic hunger. One further resembles a hungry ghost in having a stomach as big as a mountain and a mouth as small as a needle's eye. The intake is never sufficient for the hunger, so one is all the time a *peta.* The *peta's* direct opposite is the person who, on getting ten *satang*,* is content with getting just the ten *satang,* or on getting twenty *satang* is content with twenty. But don't get the idea that being easily satisfied like this means one falls into decline and stops looking for things. Intelligence tells one what has to be done, and one goes about doing it the right way. In this way, one is filled to satisfaction every time one goes after something. One enjoys the seeking and then is satisfied. This is how to live without being a *peta,* that is, without being chronically hungry. Going after something with craving constitutes being a *peta.* Going after something intelligently is not craving: then one is not a *peta;* one is simply doing what has to be done.

Thus, a wish such as the wish to extinguish suffering is not craving. Don't go telling people the wrong thing, spreading the word that mere wishing is craving or greed. To be craving or greed it must be a wish stemming from stupidity. The wish to attain *nibbāna* is a craving, if pursued with foolishness, infatuation, and pride. Going for lessons in insight meditation without knowing what it is all about is craving and greed; it is ignorance that leads to suffering because it is full of grasping and clinging. However, if a person wishes to attain *nibbāna,* after clearly and intelligently perceiving suffering and the means whereby it can be extinguished, and in this frame of mind steadily and earnestly learns about insight

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* 100 *satang* equal 1 *baht.*

meditation in the right way, then such a wish to attain *nibbāna* is not craving, and it is not suffering. So wishing is not necessarily always craving. It all depends on where it has its origin. If it stems from ignorance or the defilements, the symptoms will be similar to those of chronic hunger — that chasing without ever catching. We speak of this chronically hungry condition as spontaneous rebirth as a hungry ghost *(peta).*

The last Woeful State is the realm of the *asuras* (cowardly demons). First to explain the word *asura: sura* means "brave", *a* means "not", thus *asura* means "not brave" or "cowardly". Take it that whenever one is cowardly without reason, one has been spontaneously reborn an *asura.* Being afraid of harmless little lizards, millipedes, or earthworms is unjustified fear and a form of suffering. To be afraid unnecessarily, or to be afraid of something as a result of pondering too much on it, is to be reborn as an *asura.* We all fear death, but our fear is made a hundred or a thousand times greater by our own exaggeration of the danger. Fear torments a person all the time. He is afraid of falling into hell and in so doing becomes an *asura.* Thus he is actually falling into the Four Woeful States every day, day after day, month after month, year in and year out. If we act rightly and don't fall into these Woeful States now, we can be sure that after dying we shall not fall into the Woeful States depicted on temple walls.

This interpretation of the Woeful States agrees in meaning and purpose with what the Buddha taught. These sorts of false belief regarding the Four Woeful States should be recognized as superstition. The most pitiable thing about Buddhists is the inaccurate way we interpret the teaching of the Buddha and the stupid way we put it into practice. There's no need to go looking for superstition in other places. In the texts there are references to people imi-

tating the behaviour of cows and dogs; these were practices current in India at the time of the Buddha. There is no more of that these days, but behaviour does exist now which is just as foolish and much more undersirable. So give up all this superstition and enter the Stream of *Nibbāna.* To give up belief in a permanent ego-entity, to give up doubt, and to give up superstition is to enter the Stream of *Nibbāna* and have the Dhamma-eye — the eye that sees Dhamma and is free of delusion and ignorance.

Bear in mind that in us worldlings there is always a certain measure of ignorance and delusion in the form of ego-belief, doubt, and superstition. We must move up a step and break free of these three kinds of stupidity in order to enter the Stream of *Nibbāna.* From that point on there is a flowing downhill, a convenient sloping down towards *nibbāna,* like a large stone rolling down a mountain-side. If you are to become acquainted with *nibbāna* and the Stream of *Nibbāna,* if you are to practise towards attaining *nibbāna,* then you must understand that these three kinds of delusion and stupidity must be given up before one can give up sensual desire and ill-will, which are fetters of a higher and more subtle order. Simply giving up these three forms of ignorance constitutes entering the Stream of *Nibbāna.* To completely give up self-centredness, hesitancy in pinpointing one's life objective, and ingrained superstitious behaviour is to enter the Stream of *Nibbāna.* You can see that this kind of giving up is universally valuable and applicable to every person in the world. These three forms of ignorance are undersirable, Just as soon as a person has succeeded in giving them up he becomes an *ariyan,* a Noble One. Prior to this he is a fool, a deluded person, a lowly worldling, not at all an *ariyan.* When one has improved and progressed to the highest level of worldling, one must advance still further, until one reaches the stage where there is nowhere to go

except enter the Stream of *Nibbāna* by becoming a *sotapanna*. Then one continues to progress and flow on to *nibbāna* itself.

The practice that leads away from grasping, self-centredness, and delusion is to observe all things as unworthy of being grasped at or clung to. This results in the eradication of hesitancy, blind grasping, and self-centredness. So we ought to start taking an interest in non-attachment right this very minute, each of us at the level most appropriate for us. If you fail in an examination there is no need to weep. Determine to start again and do your best. If you pass an examination you should not become carried away; you should realize that this is the normal way of things. This will then mean that there has arisen some understanding of non-grasping and non-clinging.

When you are sitting for an examination, you should forget about yourself. Take good note of this! When starting to write an examination answer, you should forget about being yourself. Forget about the "me" who is being examined and who will pass or fail. You may think beforehand of how to go about passing the examination and plan accordingly, but as soon as you start to write, you must forget all that. Leave only concentration, which will pierce through the questions and seek out the answers. A mind free of any "me" or "mine" who will pass or fail immediately comes up agile and clean. It remembers immediately and thinks keenly. So sitting for an examination with proper concentration will produce good results. This is how to apply *cit waang* (a mind free of the self-illusion), or Buddhist non-grasping and non-clinging, when sitting for examinations. In this way you will get good results.

Those who don't know how to make use of this technique always feel anxious about failing. They become so nervous that they are unable to call to mind what they have learned. They can-

not write accurate and orderly answers. Consequently they fail thoroughly. Others become carried away by the idea that "I am brilliant, I am certain to pass." A student carried away by this sort of grasping and clinging is also bound to do poorly, because he lacks *cit waang.* On the other hand, for the "person" with *cit waang* there is no "me" or "mine" involved, so he cannot become panicky or over-confident. There remains only concentration, which is a natural power. Entirely forgetting about self, he can pass well. This is an elementary, most basic example of the effect of non-attachment and of *cit waang.*

Now a stupid and deluded person, as soon as he hears the word *suññata* mentioned in temple lecture halls, translates it as "utter emptiness or nothingness". That is the materialistic interpretation and is how certain groups of people understand it. The *suññata* of the Buddha means absence of anything that we should grasp at and cling to as being an abiding entity or self, although physically everything is there in its entirety. If we cling, there is *dukkha;* if we do not cling, there is freedom from *dukkha.* The world is described as empty because there is nothing whatsoever that we might have a right to grasp at. We must cope with this empty world with a mind that does not cling. If we want something, we must go after it with a mind free from grasping, so that we get the desired object without it becoming a source of suffering.

Misunderstanding the word "empty", just this one single word, is a great superstition *(sīlappata-parāmāsa)* and constitutes a major obstacle to people attaining the Stream of *Nibbāna.* So let us understand the word "empty", and all other words used by the Buddha, properly and completely. He described the world as empty because there is nothing in it which can be taken as a self or ego. He answered King Mogha's question by saying, "Always regard the

world as something empty. Always look on this world with all that it contains as something empty." Viewing it as empty, the mind automatically becomes free of grasping and clinging. There can not arise lust, hatred, and delusion. To succeed in doing this is to be an *arahant.* If one has not succeeded in doing it, one has to keep on trying; though still an ordinary worldling, one will have less suffering. No suffering arises as long as there is *cit waang.* Whenever one becomes carried away and lapses, there is suffering again. If we keep good watch, producing emptiness (of self-idea) more and more often and lastingly, we come to penetrate to the core of Buddhism, and come to know the Stream of *Nibbāna.* ♣

48) *Now in the short time remaining I shall put the final question:*

"What were the Buddha's last instruction to us?"

As everyone knows, a person who is about to die usually makes out a will, a set of last instructions. When the Buddha was on the point of dying, he said these last words: "All compounded things are subject to decay. Be well equipped with heedfulness!" All things are nothing but a perpetual flowing-on, that is, they are empty (of selfhood). All things are *anicca,* they change incessantly, they flow on endlessly. That perpetual flux is devoid of any self or of anything belonging to a self. Be vigilant and well prepared. In other words, don't be foolish, don't become infatuated with things, and don't regard anything as worth grasping at and clinging to. Don't mindlessly attach to anything. This is what he meant by heedfulness. With such heedfulness we must always be well equipped.

Now young people are a problem. Look how completely heedless they are. They regard all sorts of things as thoroughly desirable, as worth grasping at and clinging to. Attaching to things as either desirable or hateful is ultimately a source of distress to oneself and to others. Such people are not carrying out the instructions given in the Buddha's will. They are wasting the benefit of having been born a human being and of Buddhist parents. They are not carrying out the Buddha's last wishes.

All of us, young and old, are in a position to carry out the Buddha's last instructions. Let us not be heedless or mindless. Let us not go thoughtlessly regarding things as worth grasping at and clinging to. Let us always view the world as devoid of any self or of anything belonging to a self. Our minds will be free of grasping; lust, hatred, and delusion will not arise in them. Thus we will accomplish the highest thing which is possible for humanity. In other words, all problems will cease, and that's all there is to it.

The Buddha gave another final instruction: "Go forth and preach well the doctrine, splendid in its beginning, middle, and end." I like to interpret this as enjoining us all to teach non-grasping and non-clinging on an elementary level to children, on an intermediate level to adults, and on the highest, most advanced level to those who are heading for the Supreme State and for whom nothing else matters. The Buddha taught only non-grasping, nothing more. It can be taught on different levels to children, to people of middle age, and to old people. Or it can be taken in another way. Teach Dhamma for the benefit of people living in this world, on a low level; for benefits in other worlds, at an intermediate stage; and then for the sake of the highest benefit, which transcends all worlds.

The whole essence of the teaching can be summed up as freedom from suffering through non-attachment. Hence this non-grasping and non-clinging, this absence of any idea of self or of anything belonging to a self, is the most important teaching. So please, every one of you, bear well in mind one word, the one single word that reveals the entire Dhamma, the single syllable *waang* (empty, void, free), which in Pali is *suññatā* — the core and essence of Buddhism. People break the moral precepts because they lack *cit waang* (mind free of the self-idea). People lack concentration because they do not have *cit waang.* People have no insight because they do not have *cit waang.* The Buddha had *cit waang. Cit waang* is just what Buddhahood is. The Dhamma is simply the teaching of *cit waang,* the practice that leads to *cit waang,* and the fruit of that practice, which is *cit waang* and ultimately *nibbāna.* The Sangha consists of people following the Buddha's system of practice in order to attain *cit waang.* Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha are summed up in the word *waang* (free, void, empty). One succeeds in keeping the moral precepts through abstaining from grasping and clinging, and through being free of the mental defilements, free of grasping and clinging. When *cit waang* has been attained, the defilements are absent and concentration is at its best. When one has come to see things (the world) as empty, one doesn't grasp or cling to any of them and one has full insight. The Path and Fruit of *Nibbāna* consist in knowing emptiness and in successively gaining the fruits of emptiness right up to the very culmination. Charity, morality, taking refuge (in Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha), concentration, insight, Path and Fruit, and *nibbāna* — all these are summed up in the single word *waang* (empty).

This is why the Buddha said, "Emptiness is what I teach. A teaching that does not treat of emptiness is someone else's teach-

ing, an unorthodox teaching composed by some later disciple. All discourses which are utterances of the Accomplished One are profound, have deep significance, are the means of transcending the world, and deal primarily with emptiness *(suññatā).* "This was spoken by the Tathāgata. On the other hand, "A discourse of any kind, though produced by a poet or a learned man, versified, poetical, splendid, melodious in sound and syllable, is not in keeping with the teaching if not connected with *suññatā.* "There are these two kinds of discourses. Those dealing with *suññatā* are utterances of the Buddha; those not dealing with *suññatā* are utterances of later followers.

So the Buddha considered *suññatā* and discourses dealing with *suññatā* to be real essence of Buddhism. This is why he said, "When the teaching of *suññatā* had died out and no-one is interested in it any longer, then the real essence of the Dhamma will have been lost."

It is like the drum owned by the Dasāraha kings in ancient times, which was handed down from generation to generation. As it became worn out and dilapidated, it was patched and mended time and time again, over a long period, until eventually consisted of nothing but new materials. The real substance of it had completely disappeared.

When the time comes that *bhikkhus* no longer are concerned with studying and listening to topics relating to *suññatā,* which is the subject that they ought to be studying and practising, at that time it can be said that the original substance of Buddhism has been lost completely and that nothing remains but new material, utterances of later disciples, just as happened with the drum. Think it over! The Buddha urged us to teach the Dhamma, splendid in its beginning, middle, and end, in terms of non-grasping and non-

clinging. But what is the condition of Buddhism at the present time? Is it like the original old drum or does it consist of just new material, just patches? We can find this out for ourselves by simply examining it to see whether or not people are interested in *suññatā* and practise *suññatā.*

These were the Buddha's last instructions to his disciples: to practice heedfulness of this teaching, to proclaim this teaching and to restore the decayed material to fresh and good condition by studying *suññatā.* This is to be done by digging, probing about, studying, and discussing until such time as the understanding of this teaching has been revived and it can be said that the genuine material has been restored to its original condition. ♣



Conclusion

We have summed up the Teaching in the form of short sections, so divided as to be easily understood and remembered, together with quotations from the texts. I hope you will remember the points we have discussed in so far as they illustrate fundamental truths that you can keep in mind, and are general principles to make use of in judging and deciding the various questions you will encounter in the future. The Buddha said that if doubt arises on any point, we must compare the doubtful proposition with the general principles. If it fails to fit in with the general principles, reject

it as not being a teaching of the Buddha. Whoever made the statement has got it wrong; such a teacher is teaching the wrong thing. Even if he claims to have heard it from the Buddha himself, don't believe a word of it. If it doesn't fit in with the general principles, that is, doesn't fit in with the *Suttas* and the *Vinaya,* reject it as not being an utterance of the Buddha. The Buddha's teaching is non-grasping, non-clinging, *suññatā, anattā* (non-selfhood), and anything dealing only with elements, rather than with beings, individuals, selves, "I", and "he" or "she".

Out in the country, in the district where I come from, people used to have to learn this Pali verse on the first day they went to live in a monastery:

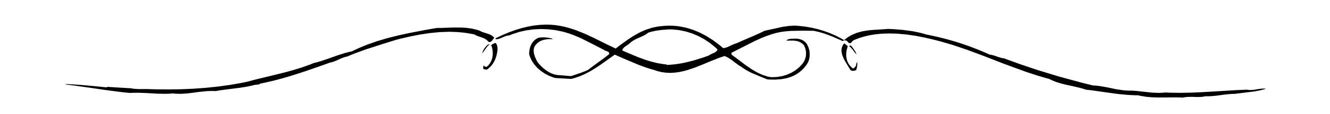
> *"Yathā paccayaṃ pavattamanaṃ dhàtumattamevetaṃ*
> (These things are merely natural elements ceaselessly concocted by conditions,)
>
> *Dhātumattako*
> (Just elements only,)
>
> *Nissatto*
> (Not real beings,)
>
> *Nijjavo*
> (Not individual lives,)
>
> *Suñño*
> (Void of any self-entity.)

They had to learn this as the first thing on the very first day they went to stay in the monastery. They had not yet learned how to pay respect to the Buddha's image, how to chant, or how to perform the morning and evening services; they had not yet learned

how to carry out the pre-ordination procedures. In other words new arrivals were equipped with the highest knowledge, the very essence of Buddhism, right from the first day they entered the monastery to ask for ordination. Whether this custom still exists anywhere I don't know, and whether applicants for ordination would understand what the verse means I don't know either. But the objective of this custom was excellent, to give a person the essence of Buddhism right from the day he arrived. *"Yathā paccayaṃ,* (these things are causally conditioned, that is, they are devoid of selfhood). *Dhātumattamevetaṃ,* (these things are only elements, that is, they are devoid of selfhood). *Nissatto, nijjivo, suñño,* (they are empty, nothing individual or personal, devoid of selfhood). "This they were taught on the very first day, but their descendants have let this custom die out. Who will be to blame when the day comes that *suññatā* is so little understood that there is. nothing left of the original Buddhism?

I hope this has done something to stimulate you good people to do some thinking, and so help nourish and sustain Buddhism.

For the sake of the peace and happiness of the world, forget all about that "self"! ♣



Scriptural References

In the original talks, Ajahn Buddhadāsa provided references (volume and page) to his sources in the Royal Siamese Pali edition of the *Tipiṭaka* where appropriate. We have translated them into a form that should help interested readers to consult the English translations. They are listed according to the numbers of the Question-Sections as found in the "Contents".

1) *Majjhima-nikāya, Alagaddūpama-sutta* (#22)

3) *Majjhima-nikāya, Cūḷa-taṇhā-saṅkheyya-sutta* (#37)

5) *Aṅguttāra-nikāya, Catukka-nipāta, Rhohitassa-vagga* (#45)

6) *Majjhima-nikāya, Alagaddūpama-sutta* (#22)

7) *Saṃyutta-nikāya, Mahāvāra-vagga,* LV, vi, 3

8) *Saṃyutta-nikāya, Mahāvāra-vagga,* XLV, i, 76

9) *Aṅguttāra-nikāya,Pañcaka-nipāta,* The Warrior (#79)

10) *Majjhima-nikāya, Cūḷa-saccaka-sutta* (#35)

11) *Aṅguttāra-nikāya, Tika-nipāta, Mahā-vagga, Kālāma Sutta* (#65)

12) *Aṅguttāra-nikāya, Tika-nipāta,* Enlightenment, (#103)

13) *Majjhima-nikāya, Saḷāyatana-vibhaṅga-sutta* (#137)

14) *Aṅguttāra-nikāya, Tika-nipāta, Devaduta-vagga* (#33)
Aṅguttāra-nikāya, Catukka-nipāta, Kamma-vagga (#234)

15) *Aṅguttāra-nikāya, Tika-nipāta, Puggala-vagga* (#22)

16) *Aṅguttāra-nikāya, Catukka-nipāta, Sañcetana-vagga* (#180)

17) *Aṅguttāra-nikāya, Tika-nipāta, Brāhmana-vagga* (#56)

18) *Aṅguttāra-nikāya, Catukka-nipāta, Uruvelā-vagga* (#21)

19) *Itivuttaka* III, v, iii

20) *Digha-nikāya, Mahā-vagga, Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* (#16)

21) *Sutta-nipāta, Parayana-vagga, Vatthugāthā*

22) *Majjhima-nikāya, Cūḷa-suññatā-sutta* (#121)

23) *Paṭisambhidā-magga, Yoganaddha-vagga, Suñña-kathā*

24) *Saddhammappajjotikā* Part I

25) *Paṭisambhidā-magga, Paññā-vagga, Vipassanākathā*

26) *Aṅguttāra-nikāya, Navaka-nipāta, Mahā-vagga* (#36)

27) *Aṅguttāra-nikāya, Navaka-nipāta, Mahā-vagga* (#41)

28) *Aṅguttāra-nikāya, Navaka-nipāta, Pancāla-vagga* (#51)

Aṅguttāra-nikāya, Satta-nipāta, Abyākata-vagga (#52)

29) *Majjhima-nikāya, Bhaddāli-sutta* (#65)

31) *Digha-nikāya, Mahā-vagga, Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* (#16)

34) *Udāna, Culla-vagga,* VII, i and ii

Aṅguttāra-nikāya, Satta-nipāta, Abyākata-vagga (#53)

37) *Majjhima-nikāya, Angulimāla-sutta* (#86)

39) *Itivuttaka,* I, iii, 7

40) *Aṅguttāra-nikāya, Navaka-nipāta, Sihanāda-vagga* (#20)

41) *Itivuttaka,* III, iv, 4

48) *Digha-nikāya, Mahā-vagga, Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* (#16)



About the Author

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu (Slave of the Buddha) went forth as a *bhikkhu* (Buddhist monk) in 1926, at the age of twenty. After a few years of study in Bangkok, he was inspired to live close with nature in order to investigate the Buddha-Dhamma. Thus, he established Suan Mokkhabalārāma (The Grove of the Power of Liberation) in 1932, near his hometown. At that time, it was the only Forest Dhamma Center and one of the few places dedicated to *vipassanā* (mental cultivation leading to "seeing clearly" into reality) in Southern Thailand. Word of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, his work, and Suan Mokkh spread over the years so that now they are easily described as "one of the most influential events of Buddhist history in Siam." Here, we can only mention some of the more interesting services he has rendered Buddhism.

Ajahn Buddhadāsa has worked painstakingly to establish and explain the correct and essential principles of original Buddhism. That work is based in extensive research of the Pali texts (Canon and commentary), especially of the Buddha's Discourses *(sutta piṭaka),* followed by personal experiment and practice with these teachings. Then he has taught whatever he can say truly quenches *dukkha.* His goal has been to produce a complete set of references for present and future research and practice. His approach has been always scientific, straightforward, and practical.

Although his formal education only went as far as seventh grade and beginning Pali studies, he has been given five Honorary Doctorates by Thai universities. His books, both written and transcribed from talks, fill a room at the National Library and influence all serious Thai Buddhists.

Progressive elements in Thai society, especially the young, have been inspired by his teaching and selfless example. Since the 1960's, activists and thinkers in areas such as education, social welfare, and rural development have drawn upon his teaching and advice.

Since the founding of Suan Mokkh, he has studied all schools of Buddhism, as well as the major religious traditions. This interest is practical rather than scholarly. He seeks to unite all genuinely religious people in order to work together to help free humanity by destroying selfishness. This broadmindedness has won him friends and students from around the world, including Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs.

Now he focuses his energies on his last project, establishing an International Dhamma Hermitage. This addition to Suan Mokkh is intended to provide facilities for:

— courses which introduce friends, foreign and Thai, to the natural truth explained in the Buddha's teachings and start them in the Buddha's system of mental cultivation

— gatherings of representatives from the different religious communities of Thailand (and later the world) in order to meet, develop mutual good understanding, and cooperate for the sake of world peace

— meetings among Buddhists from around the world to discuss and agree upon the "Heart of Buddhism"

Actual results must depend on Natural Law, as Ajahn Buddhadāsa and his helpers continue to explore the potential of mindfully wise actions within Nature according to the Law of Nature. He welcomes visitors.

About the translator

Rod Bucknell first became seriously interested in Buddhism in the mid-1960's, when, during a visit to Thailand, he was introduced to the techniques of insight meditation. After spending a year in various Thai meditation centres and monasteries, he took ordination as a *bhikkhu* (monk) under the guidance of Ajahn Paññānanda of Wat Cholapratan Rangsarit. He soon became interested also in the teachings of Ajahn Buddhadāsa, and, recognizing their potential value to westerners, began translating some of the Ajahn's more important works into English. During the four years he spent in the Sangha, he translated altogether six works of varying length, usually in close consultation with the Ajahn in order to ensure accuracy in the rendering of key concepts. Despite his return to lay life, he maintains a close interest — both scholarly and practical in Ajahn Buddhadāsa's teachings, and has published several related articles in religious studies journals. He is currently a lecturer in the Department of Studies in Religion at the University of Queensland, Australia. ♣

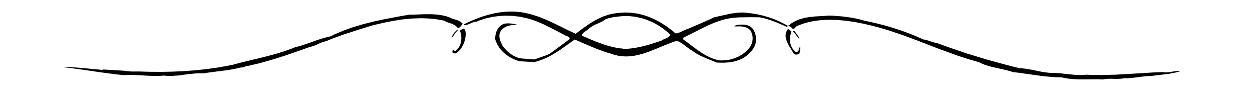


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Verse for Transferring Merit

I vow that this merit
Will adorn the buddha's pure land
Repaying four kinds of kindness above
Aiding those below in the three paths of suffering
May those who see and hear
All bring forth the bodhi heart
And when this retribution body is done
Be born together in the land of ultimate bliss



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